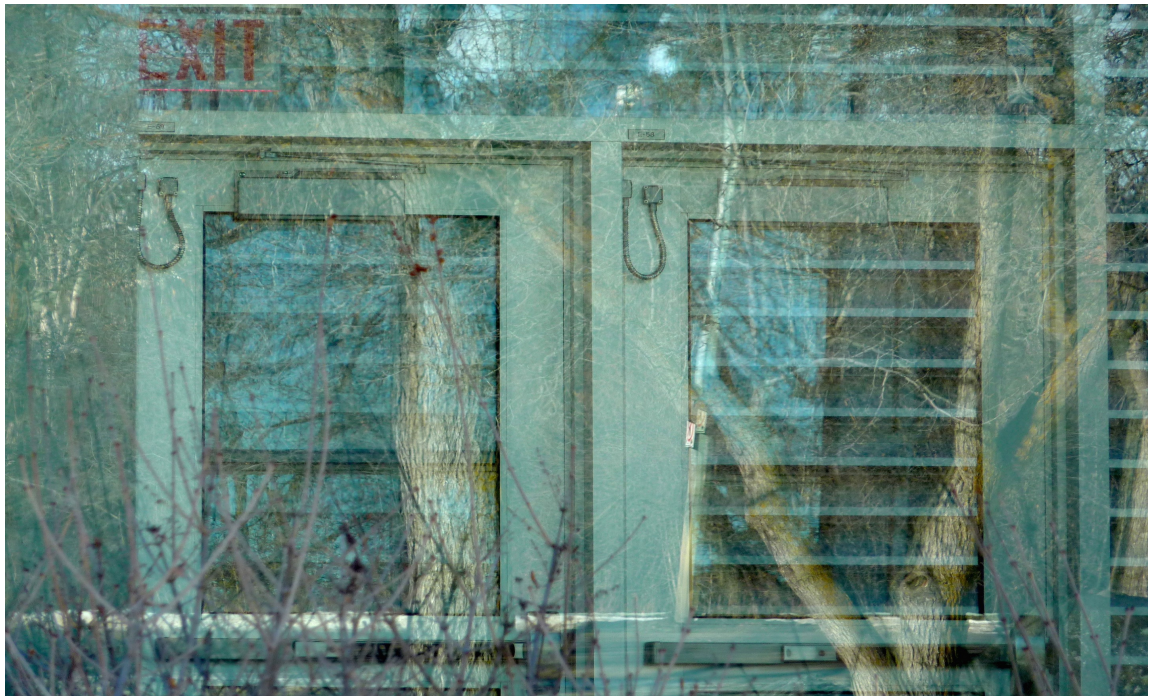


Lesley Battler | **Journal** | 1983



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 3, 1983

I continue my program at Seneca College – I am officially granted my BA from Queen's University – Relationships with classmates deepen – Trapped in an Enid Blyton boarding-school book – Good old Toronto – Anti-cruise missile demonstrations – Work placement at the Art Gallery of Ontario – An important wedding – A high school friend falls into the clutches of Reverend Dimmesdale.

Jan. 4

Can't believe I'm back at Seneca. Joanne really sweet to me today. She said she thought of me over the holidays and wondered what I was doing. She made some resolutions, to try harder, to not worry so much about things, and to stop gossiping about Wilfred. Coffee with Ellen, Joanne, Nancy. Ellen really liked my haircut, said it suited me. I was happy to see them, but none of it seemed real. I was still in Montreal.

**

Yasunari Kawabata's *Beauty and Sadness* is exactly that. The writing is so subtle. Characters are crystalline. They do not make contact when they touch, but are frozen surfaces reflecting colours changing around them. Separate, unconnected, alone, emotions buried deep inside. There is no release, no consummation, only an intensification. As a reader, you look through the surface, peering through multi-coloured layers of ice. Shifting colour, tone, nuance. A lost music resonating across a dark frozen landscape.

**

Set up our waterbed! It really feels like rocking on the sea. Wonderful.

**

We've all made it to second term except Rose, who is now part-time. She is adamant about library work, is certain that it's what she's meant to do. She asks people for advice and when she doesn't get the answer she wants, she accuses us of not caring. I heard her telling a group that no one cared about her and no one was willing to help her.

One day I ran into her in the washroom and smiled at her. She thought I was laughing at her. "I look sick don't I," she said resentfully. I left. She seems alone, drifting through the universe. She's one of the few people in the class I really don't know and it seems as if she doesn't have any connections. The other thing about Rose is that although she dresses nicely, she looks like she comes from the 1950s. She's about my age but looks old-fashioned.

Mr Alchuk told me I got the highest mark in the B section. He likes to talk about how thick-skinned he is and how nothing bothers him, but there is kindness in his eyes. He's very theatrical, and likes to exaggerate the importance of library work. I enjoy his flamboyant gestures and ubiquitous cup of coffee. He is also amusing. He will place his hands on his hips, narrow his eyes and threaten us. "If you think you can just walk into a library and say 'here I am, aren't I great' you have another think coming."

One day he went on a spiel about typing chairs. He can spiel on any subject, nothing is too trivial. He told us the typing room was for library techs and if others tried to use it, we were to diplomatically tell them to leave. "However, if someone who is 6'8 comes in, six of you should go and tell him. Above all, don't come to me for help." He's 5'4 or so. Another time he was drinking his black coffee and grimaced. He had just been to the dentist, but said his coffee is more important than the dentist. I know he rubs some people the wrong way, and he really dislikes Kim Jackson, but I really enjoy him.

**

Sat with some of the older women in the class, Liz Dilley, Susan Chapman, Andrea Jones. They are lively, funny and it sometimes seems like they have more spirit and spunk than my regular group. Liz said the decision to go back to school was very strong. Once she had decided to do it she had to do it now, it couldn't wait for even a year. It became a test for her.

Similar situation for Susan. They talked about their husbands and families and I am appalled at how these women are treated – the thoughtlessness, as if they really are only servants. Liz went out to dinner with a friend and put a casserole in the oven for her husband and son. They came home and couldn't even be bothered to warm it up and take it out of the oven. They went to McDonald's instead. I hope to be one of those who changes that. Liz is quiet, feminine, soft-spoken, but she has a mischievous streak and an irreverent sense of humour that comes out every so often.

**

Andrea Jones has been giving me rides lately, going out of her way from her farm in Port Perry and not taking any gas money. She is plain-spoken with a blunt square chin, but her eyes are deep and full of feeling. She has suffered a lot of pain in her life, but it has not hardened her. She told me about her son, Russ, who is seventeen and has mental problems. He flies into violent rages and breaks things then denies they ever happen. The police brought him back to the farm today, but understand the situation and are lenient. Russ has finally decided to see a psychiatrist to get help. Andrea has three sons and mentioned that there was another one who had died when he was fourteen. She says she makes a point of always mentioning him because if she didn't, she would feel as if she were denying his existence.

Jan. 27

Went to Ottawa to visit Fred's father's partner, Irma. There was a death in her family and Fred and his brothers were showing support.

**

On to Montréal then down into the States with Fred. Drove into a little trail, snow shuddering under the wheels, huge orange moon rising in a night sky.

It felt like we are on a mysterious errand, fleeing into the night bearing a mysterious envelope, black cloaks wrapped around us. Smugglers, highwaymen. Dark journeys, mysterious deeds. Sinister driving through an industrial site this time of night. Desolation. Smell of sulfur and brimstone. Eerie green lights, stairs curling up into huge tanks.

Feb. 1

Ugh, journalism and history day. To be this age, sitting in a classroom regurgitating *Globe & Mail* articles. I can't even pretend to be interested in this class. As for history ... it was great that Mr Boom loved my Plato presentation, but it's still a horrible class. The only high point today came when Ms Dodd mentioned she had read and liked *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling*. She said it was "one weird book" but she had liked it. She also said no one else she knew has even heard of it, and she can't discuss it with anyone. I discovered this book through Anaïs Nin, and found a copy at the World's Biggest Bookstore. I told Ms Dodd I had read the book. Her face lit up for a second. Els Van Dam wanted to know the author's name and while I was writing it down for her, Ms Dodd left the room. I should have known there would be no contact between us. I think she's close to retirement and doesn't see or hear students any more.

I loathe Journalism class and have no idea why we have to take it. Every sentence I write is an effort. Words heavy as lead. Talked with Joanne and Sharon Cooper. Sharon mentioned that Ellen had got a B+ on her Journalism assignment. Joanne and I said in unison, "Ellen got a B+??" We looked at each other and laughed. Then I said, "Bet we got a C+ then." I was right.

**

Maria Buisman, my bus buddy, had a birthday yesterday. Her brother and father got into a fight. Her father stalked off and said he wasn't going to do anything that night except eat a sandwich. Maria walked the dog, then put on her good clothes and decided to go have dinner herself. When she was halfway out the door, her father changed his mind and decided to go with her. I admire her for having the determination to leave that house and go have a birthday dinner by herself.

**

Another unusual encounter with Rose. She glided up to me and said in a wondering voice, "Your brother -" I looked at her, very curious. She tilted her head and said "I heard from someone that your brother - ." Then she shook her head and said, "Oh, I'll tell you later."

Feb. 8

Boarded the bus with Mr Alchuk today. He is very nice and understanding. Mary Maleki thinks he is adorable. We had a good talk all the way to York Mills; chit-chat, TTC-talk. Unlike Ms Dodd he has an intuitive knowledge of the students, and a good memory. He likes to sit at the back of the bus and subway so he can "curl up in the seat."

He asked how I was making out with the commuting and said I was either developing a lot of stamina or I was a masochist. He asked me if I missed Queen's and I said I did. Then I told him how going to Seneca made me feel as if I was stepping backwards into high school again. He agreed, mentioning prescribed timetables (journalism, history, anyone?). I said it was the variety of people in the class that made it worthwhile, that if I were in Group A, with the younger students just out of high school, I wouldn't survive. He agreed and said it would be "pretty deadly."

We carried on to the subway. He said he felt lonely because Ms Dodd and Mrs Weihs were both off sick and he felt he was "holding the fort all by himself." He phoned them twice, wondering when they would be back.

He told me about Mrs Weihs's hypoglycemia, and then there was another announcement about a transit emergency. We continued talking while the train paused. He was trying to decide to stay where he was or get out and walk to his place. He gets off at College and lives in an apartment near Robarts Library. I am so envious.

Feb. 12

Fred and I went to see a Japanese film called *the Muddy River*. It was wonderful, one of the best movies I've ever seen. Each scene was beautiful, poignant, photographed in black and white like a dream or memory. Falling rain, rustling, whispering, soft footsteps, shadows. The film deals with loss of innocence as a series of tiny revelations, perceptions that build up. A deeper, more subtle and profound mix of pain, sadness and beauty than a more standard sexual initiation story could have been. The innocence is lost long before sexual coming-of-age. It's those memory/dreams of childhood that are truly devastating and so often unexplored.

Feb. 13

Went to the ballet with Sharon and Al. *Coppelia*, starring Veronica Tennant. Pragmatic Al objected to the story-line but Sharon and I are happy to just sit and watch the colours, costumes, setting and the dancing itself. Sharon is engaged to Ernie. No details yet.

**

Been taking the bus with Mika every night this week. She beckons to me and we run down the hall to her locker to escape Fred Merritt. Gentle, perceptive, dreamy, fretful Mika. Sometimes I have this strange urge to kiss her on top of the head.

Fred Merritt has been waiting after class to take the bus with me. I like him. I find him intelligent, fun and highly aware of people. We analyze people when we're on the bus, but he is very good hearted and likes being around everyone. He never leaves for the day without making his final farewell to anyone left in the room.

Feb. 18

Choosing new books in Ms Dodd's Collections course. Most of them about "real life." Well-written, modest and forgettable. But it's an easy course for me, and relevant. I think sometimes Ms Dodd feels a little bit of guilt about her abruptness with us. There are times she looks a little lost, as if she doesn't know whether or not she's getting through to us. On Friday she remained in the class longer than usual talking about books with Marg Austin and Andrea, making an effort to be companionable. Then she looked at us and said, "Aren't you going home?" She gave us a baffled look, as if all of a sudden she realized she didn't know who we were or why we were there. She even said "Goodbye kids" as she locked up and left.

I enjoy her class, though, and appreciate her dry humour, intelligence and some of her colourful expressions. She was pleasant to me one day in the hall. She smiled at me (not gritting her teeth) and told me I looked "very smart in my britches." I almost fell over backwards.

Got my transcripts, all As, I'm also on the Dean's honour list. This term will be more difficult with cataloguing and that journalism class.

**

Yes, I admit I enjoy riding the bus with Fred Merritt, talking over the day's small events with him. His enthusiasm cheers me up. One afternoon Mr Alchuk was sitting near us on the bus. I knew he was there but let on, figuring the last thing he needed was Fred Merritt. Let the poor man curl up at the back in peace, to rest up from the day's performance. No such luck. Fred M nudged me and said very loudly, "It's Mr. Alchuk! Hello Sir!" I was embarrassed and looked out the window, silently hoping he hadn't heard. But as soon as we stood up, Mr A said, "Don't worry, I just tune everything out." Not the first time he has answered my thoughts!

Fred Merritt told me that Mr Alchuk has an MA in history and taught high school for two years. Then he got his MLS from U of T. He worked in a special library at Queen Elizabeth hospital and another special library in Montréal. He's been all over the world, doing research in the libraries of France, Italy, England and Egypt. "Mr Merritt" knows everything!

**

I hate cataloguing. Ready to tear my hair out by the roots. How can people actually spend their lives doing this? It feels like the old days of math class. Joanne is good at cataloguing but even the simplest instructions elude me.

**

Talked to Mary Maleki on the bus. I do enjoy meeting up with her. She's from England and has only been living in Toronto for a year. Her husband is Iranian and has a PhD in chemistry. So many people in this library program have such interesting backgrounds. She said the lack of oxygen in the room affects her so that she always has the sniffles. (Mr Alchuk told me he got a note from facilities saying they would fix the ventilation. He thanked me for going down and talking to them.) Poor Mary got an earful of my cataloguing woes. Everyone has been telling me they enjoy it; it gives them a feeling of accomplishment. I just find it mind-boggling.

**

Sometimes I think Rosalind Cotter is the most fantastical of all my friends. She's also the only one I know who can speak Latin. I received a mysterious little card from her. She is, apparently, in Toronto but did not include a return address, nor did she mention when or why she moved. There was only a phone number in the card. I called the number feeling like some kind of spy or detective. The phone connected to some unknown place in Toronto, and it felt as if Rosalind did not live anywhere but was just floating around the city. All that connected us was a phone line.

It was a curious disjointed conversation, abrupt subject changes. I found out that she has some sort of part-time job, and that she lives on Cosmo Road (figures), possibly with one of her sisters. She is getting married to her Latin teacher from the conservative Catholic college she went to (or was sent to by her father) in Boston. The date is August 15.

We made plans to meet on Saturday to see a movie. We are to meet sometime around 6:00 at a restaurant in the Eaton's Centre, the "first restaurant," which may or may not be called the Mug. Tentative plans have us meeting for supper and getting across town to the Beaches for a 7:00 movie.

March 1

Talk with Fred about time and space. The farther away from Earth you are, the farther back in time you are actually seeing Earth. If you are ten light years away, you would be seeing events that happened ten years ago. Somewhere in the universe, Hiroshima could be happening now. You can go back in time while going ahead. Time doesn't really disappear at all. Events happen at different times at different places in the universe – so our whole concept of time isn't real. The Crab Nebula super nova, which was witnessed in the 1800s, actually occurred several million years ago. Everything happens simultaneously in different dimensions, and nothing that happens is ever really over.

The same event continues to happen over and over, only on different levels in different places. We don't see the stars as they are; we see them as they were. The farther away they are, the farther back in their past we are seeing. We see the farthest edges of the universe as they were at the beginning of time. The edges that we can see are ancient. We don't see anything as it is now. The present, as we know it, occurs only on Earth. 2000 light years away from here, Jesus is being born.

**

Italo Calvino's book *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* goes along with my new concepts of time, space and distance. He removes the boundaries of reading. Reading becomes an experience, an adventure spanning all countries of the world, a world where everything can happen. This book is not a block of action that moves in one piece toward a conclusion – like a train chugging into the station. Instead, we get layers of stories, a kaleidoscope of plots, characters and events. Above all, potentialities.

“Because in this way all I did was to accumulate past after past behind me, multiplying the pasts, and if one life was too dense and ramified and embroiled for me to bear it always with me, imagine so many lives, each with its own past and the pasts of the other lives that continue to become entangled one with the others ...” (106)

“You appeared for the first time in a bookshop; you took shape, detaching yourself from a wall of shelves, as if the quantity of books made the presence of a young lady Reader necessary. Your house, being the place in which you read, can tell us the position books occupy in your life, if they are a defense you set up to keep the outside world at a distance, if they are a dream into which you sink as if into a drug, or bridges you cast toward the outside, toward the world that interests you so much that you want to multiply and extend its dimensions through books ...” (142)

March 7

Met Kim and Joanne at Eaton’s Centre. Kim was indefatigable, going through every store then leading us on a long walk to Toby’s. Joanne felt tired and depressed and left early. Kim is a morning person, has endless energy and loves to go shopping. Found out that she also wants to run a bookstore, where she could sell handicrafts and children’s books. Her eyes are blue-grey-green, always in motion. She is capable of saying blunt and rather brutal things to others because “they should face reality.”

We went to Cedarbrae Library in Scarborough to do research. Saw Michael de Morée’s photography exhibition on dolls while I was there. A woman and child were also looking at the photos and the woman said, “Look at the nice pictures of the dollies.” Actually, they were nightmare photos of decayed old dolls. She just assumed that because they were dolls and connected with childhood they had to be nice or harmless? Some of the dolls were staring into space with little rosebud mouths, expressions that will never change, flesh the colour of tombstones, arms lifted, crossed, placed in positions of greeting, perpetual hellos and goodbyes, rigidly fixed. Effigies, corpses.

Went to Kim's for dinner. She made spaghetti and saw me off at the door, making new plans, thrusting bran muffins and salt-water taffy at me. Benjamin blew me a kiss. With Kim, friendship is open, loose, free and light. Some day I'll learn the pleasure of light surface conversation.

Dark and foggy when I left Kim's. Standing at the bus stop under the streetlight, covered in an amber light. Boarded the bus and couldn't see where I was going. Lights skimmed by, like neon stripes on fish deep under the sea. Only one other person on the bus, which seemed to be speeding out of control toward some unknowable destination.

**

Reading Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*. Amazing. I love the casual way the narrator relates these fantastic events, beautiful dream environments. There is no shock or horror or even wonder expressed. The narrator observes the wild beauty and strangeness as if it is all the most natural thing in the world.

"The gale blew cold and dead colours onto the sky – streaks of green, yellow and violet – the distant vaults and arcades of spirals. The roofs loomed black and crooked, apprehensive and expectant. Those under which the wind had already penetrated, rose in inspiration, outgrew the neighbouring roofs and prophesied doom under the unkempt sky. Then they fell and expired, unable to hold any longer the powerful breach which then moved along and filled the whole space with noise and terror. And yet more houses rose with a scream, in a paroxysm of prediction and howled disaster." (119, 122)

March 15

Brought in a page of a storybook I am writing and illustrating for Benjamin's birthday (June 11). Andrea Jones saw it called it "enchanted," and then said to the room in general, "I keep feeling dumber all the time." Actually, I wish I could be more like her. Mr Alchuk wandered in and said, "Isn't that beautiful! What course is that for?" I explained it was a birthday present for a child and I was finishing it here while waiting for the bus. He said I had talent and I was lucky because not very many people could both write and illustrate.

March 16

Went to Kingston to see if I could finally get my Concordia night courses credited toward my BA. Left at midnight last night. A lovely productive day. First things first. I went to the Arts and Sciences office to inquire about the courses. Everyone nice and helpful. Fred, Wheeze and I then went to Watson Hall in search of Prof Colin Norman, who had degree-granting power. He was courteous and sat down with me to go over the course description for Terry Byrnes's Creative Writing class. Since I only needed one elective, Prof Norman gave it to me. Wheeze and I were jubilant, soft-shoeing around the English office to the amusement of the secretaries.

Warm spring day on campus. All down University Ave stereos still blasting the Eagles Greatest. The students all looked like people I knew. All day I felt as if I'd stepped back into a memory. Spent a nice day with Wheeze. She moved out of John's place and currently lives with his sister Sylvia on Emily Street – a storybook address. She has a view of the lake and a room-mate who is a ballerina. She misses John, though. We drank wine, ordered Chinese food and talked about Sharon's wedding. Marsha is just as baffled as I am. Apparently Sharon has been giving Wheeze the "Aunt Agnes routine," regaling her with frightening platitudes about leaving John and finding the right man as she, Sharon, has done. I guess Sharon is getting her wish and becoming old before her time.

Sharon seems to feel that she and Ernie are compatible and she won't do any better. She told me the very day she announced her engagement that she really wanted someone in between Ernie and Al. Well, at least Wheeze and I are off the hook – we don't have to be attendants.

March 18

An intellectual theme today. I came into class with 2 shopping bags full of Ms Dodd's books (Collections course). I told Mary M that I felt like an intellectual bag-lady carting shopping bags full of books into subway stations. Kim said she wished she was an intellectual like me and I said I wished I was practical like Kim.

Later today Mr A gave us our final ordering assignment. We have to choose a subject and get permission from him. He wouldn't let me choose either English lit or art history, going so far as to proclaim this in front of his audience. He then said I was "too intellectual." He suggested I try something practical. Said he thought of me earlier in connection with my book, so we eventually decided on drawing – specifically book illustrations.

Fred Merritt enjoys Mr A's class because Mr A always answers him back, always has a swift comeback. He even enjoys it when Mr. A is in a bad mood and starts cutting people down. Fred said he has never had a teacher like that before, most of them just make him leave the room.

I told Ellen how much I appreciate her supportiveness in class. When I do presentations I always see her sitting straight and alert, encouraging, so loyal to her group. She was really happy someone noticed and appreciated it.

Linda Partington is a paradox. Although she is a staunch feminist, she is one of the least supportive people in class, never tells anyone they are doing a good job.

**

A very cold March. Feels like Christmas today with a white snowlight coming in through the windows. Technically, it's the first day of spring but I'm enjoying the wintry feeling. Nancy and I had a good talk over coffee about cataloguing and library work in general. She is going through much the same as me. First term was a breeze, but the core work isn't that easy. We're getting the same marks on Mrs Weihs's assignments. Nancy thinks, feels and struggles against things, always trying to swim upstream. Doing things the hard way. She reacts instantly to everything. She is interesting, intelligent and expressive. She's also way cooler than anyone I ever hung out with in high school.

We were walking toward the classroom when Mr A pulled in beside me. He asked how I made it home during the snow storm. I told him I took the train and everyone in Toronto had the same idea so it was a cattle car. He said in his exaggerated voice, "Now that's dedication." I said it was more likely masochism. And then he disappeared again. His personality is so fluid and he slips in and out of sight. He is non-committal, allusive but his memory and intuition are phenomenal.

Kim's questions in class make Mr A very defensive. She really goads him by asking frivolous questions at the wrong time. Worst of all, her approach tends to be personal, and when it comes to being pinned to anything personal, Mr A is not your man. He will fold up and vanish. In class, Kim said she heard rumours that there were no jobs. Mr A flared right up and told her he didn't give a damn where she heard these stories and she had better stop listening to rumours. He felt personally attacked and he is a very self-protective person. Kim invades his space. Fred Merritt says he enjoys Mr A's barbs and how he always has to get the last word. Me, I'll just keep my mouth shut. He seems to like me and I really don't ever want to be on his bad side. It is lethal between him and Kim J.

**

Feels like a festive Friday although it is only Wednesday. Mika leaves for Europe tomorrow and she, Ellen, Joanne and I went for drinks at St Hubert. It was a nice time, a good mix of personalities. Mika talked about her trips and her choir. We managed to get her interested in talking about travelling so she could forget how harried she feels about the actual preparations. We both feel we are born travellers. Even Ellen said she wants to save up some money to go somewhere, that she doesn't want to stay in Toronto all her life. That's a change from the last time we were at St Hubert and she said she wasn't at all cosmopolitan and preferred the tried and true. It is always so interesting we all influence each other, how we change our perspectives depending on who we're with.

**

Fred and I went to the Carlton Cinema in Toronto to see *the Night of the Shooting Stars*, an Italian film that takes place in occupied Italy during WWII. It was the most "human" movie I've seen in a long time. It revealed every thought and feeling of these displaced villagers, the cruelty, triviality, foolishness and courage of human beings. Heartbreaking scenes where friends fight to the death, and a strangely beautiful scene depicting an older man and woman. Raining, bells ringing. Sad jubilation as the man stays behind in the rain, lingering as long as he can, while the woman gets on the wagon with the rest of the villagers. The yellow wall of the building glowing through the rain. An aching hope.

Another powerful image occurs when the villagers are gathered together, dressed in black cloaks, just before the bombs explode in San Martino. One of the villagers requests that his name be changed to “Requiem.” And – and the beauty of the Italian countryside as background to all this turmoil, quiet warm light, olive trees shimmering on gentle slopes. So many contrasts.

March 28

Sat with some of my other classmates today talking about university, other careers, etc. Linda Partington said she came from a pretty solid middle-class family and was expected to go to university. When she dropped out, she became a pariah to her family. She said she had to face the reality that she had to make a living and support herself and her young daughter, but that she wanted to be an entertainer. “Yes, one of those,” she said forcefully. “A parasite on society.” She said there were times she wanted so badly to drop all of this and just go out and sing for people. Very fierce.

**

Day of defiance. We let Mr Holmes have it in that stupid Journalism class. All kinds of grievances came out today and I was the one who started it all by complaining about writing re-hashes of Globe & Mail articles, how I didn’t see the purpose. I also said that he had such low expectations of us, we couldn’t be expected to write anything that was up to his standards. Surprising response. He said we were a far brighter and more literate group than usual and he had to raise his standards for us. Then everyone in the class got in on the act. Andrea Jones spoke out for all of us and we applauded her.. At the end of it all he said he hoped we had cleared the air. I said that I thought so, even if there were still some thunder clouds in the distance. He laughed. Maybe he can be reached after all, and I guess we should have done this months ago.

The day wasn't over yet. At the beginning of our history class, Mr Giffen said he wouldn't read the test results out loud, that he wouldn't do such a thing. Then he proceeded to read them out anyway. Ellen was infuriated. She protested and he kept right on reading. Then she got up and called him a twit on her way out the door. He heard her and continued reading the rest of the marks. I then got up and followed her out. Ellen was congratulated by the rest of the class and Els called her "our hero." I guess you don't have to have a lot of qualifications to teach at a community college!

Ended the day with Mr Alchuk on the bus. He was going down to Queen Station to pick up some chocolate Easter eggs for his niece and nephew, so we had a nice long conversation. I mentioned my Queen's graduation and found out he had gone to Queen's, back when the only residence was Ban Righ, and you had to stay in boarding houses. Ms Dodd and Mrs Weihs also went to Queen's. Every so often the three of them get together and reminisce. He is so protective of them.

He has really been around. He went to McGill, Ann Arbor, to the Sorbonne for graduate studies in History and then to the Ontario College of Education. He was a high school history teacher for a couple of years. He asked me what my subject was and I said English lit. He looked wry and said, "I should have guessed by the way you write." He asked if I was going to get my grad pictures taken. I said I was just having the diploma mailed to me. He said that was being awfully blasé for a first degree. He told me to keep my chin up about cataloguing. "One day it will all fall into place." Famous last words. He is pleased that everyone is making it through so far. "There haven't been any casualties."

March 31

Started crying in the typing room. I won't ever be a grade A cataloguer, I'm so afraid of failing this, of not finishing the program and then I felt so stupid bursting into tears like a little drama queen. Oh boo hoo, poor me.

Els Van Dam was wonderful to me. She hugged me close and told me she had gone through the same thing yesterday. She did very poorly on the last set of cards and had wandered the halls with tears in her eyes, until her friend David Edwards took her by the arm and bought her a coffee. Els did the same for me and said I should cry and let it out, that Andrea and a few others had gone through the same thing. On the way to the cafeteria she said I was such an intelligent girl, she looked up to me and respected me so much because I was so well read. That opened a floodgate. Joanne joined in and kept telling me I was brilliant and had so much talent. After the tears dried up I felt badly, as if I had staged the whole thing to get sympathy, and have no pride whatsoever.

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Mr Alchuk is nothing if not colourful. Talked about work placements today. He told us not to be shy, but also not to arrive, “announcing our presences with drums and cymbals.” He also saw fit to warn us not to expect “these exotic workplaces,” and I enjoyed the thought of special libraries in offices filled with tropical plants and toucans. I’ve noticed that his gestures are even more flamboyant with Group A. He seems more easy-going with them, perhaps because they are younger. With us, he sometimes he gets quit defensive and caustic. Nippy, as Fred M puts it.

April 23

To Toronto to visit Sharon. We went to an artisan show at the CNE. The day was sunny, breezy and we had a nice time wandering around looking at beautiful handcrafted clothes and objects. She is playing the role of getting married to Ernie to the utmost. Some friction between us. She tends to idolize some people from Elrond and cannot conceive of the idea that I am no longer interested. She said, somewhat reproachfully, that she wished Marsha and I had been at Flo Watson’s reunion, that it had been so much fun. I bit my tongue.

Nice walk through the Italian neighbourhood, where Sharon and Ernie currently live. I love discovering new areas of Toronto, and it felt like we crossed borders into two different towns today. Dinner with Sharon and Ernie. I find him very hyper and never feel comfortable with him. His temper seems unpredictable, but he is intelligent, demonstrative, and a good companion for Sharon. Interesting to reflect on how full-circle Sharon has come, how she says and believes the exact opposite to what she used to a couple of years ago. Today she lambasted women in their late twenties who have not had a serious relationship.

Another thing about Sharon is how she dissociates herself from former feelings or beliefs as if she had never thought or felt that way. She seems to project these purged feelings onto other people. Now that she is engaged to Ernie, it is as if she had never feared growing old and alone. She is also adept at borrowing from other people to bolster her own self. She admires her Elrond friend Dave Wood's dry wit, so now, after recently seeing him, she talks about her own dry wit, which I have never heard her mention before today. This ongoing process of borrowing and discarding parts of herself makes it challenging to follow her sometimes.

On our way to the bus stop, Sharon talked about the dramatic change in Marsha, since Marsha left John. She sees Marsha as being back to normal; no more rages and fury. I see more of her old unrest, yearning and vitality, a sense of release. But Sharon really does not like John, and that colours everything she says about that relationship.

**

Reading *the Woman in the Dunes* by Kobo Abe.

"A milky mist billowed and swirled above the cliff. Spaces of shadow, speckled with the remains of night ... spaces that sparkled as if glowing wire ... spaces flowing with particles of shining vapor.

"The combination of shadows was filled with fantasies and stirred limitless reveries in him. He would never tire of looking at the sight. Every moment overflows with new discoveries. Everything was there, actual shapes confounded with fantastic forms he had never seen before." (217)

**

Getting closer to Nancy and Lynn these days. The Group of 7 went up to the Deli, and that was a nice break. Feels as if it has been a long time since I've been on an outing with everyone. Lynn gave us all lovely little notes saying she hoped to see us over the summer and in September. Ellen declared she would be coming back to school next year, even if she was offered a great job, because she wouldn't want to go through it without all of us.

Mrs Weihs gave us our job placements. I'll be working at the Art Gallery of Ontario! Nancy is enthusiastic about working in a school. Ellen is fascinated by banking and is thrilled about her placement at the Royal Bank Plaza. Johanne Cunliffe was placed at the McMichael Gallery, which sounds like a great fit, until you find out she hates the Group of 7!

**

Talk with Andrea Jones early this morning. I love her so much. She told me that her family life wasn't the greatest right now and sometimes she writes in a little journal. She thinks it is wonderful that the people in our class are so supportive. When she was younger, someone helped her in a way she couldn't begin to repay and so, her way of repaying that kindness is to help me.

Coffee alone with Ellen. Doesn't happen often, but we had a nice talk. We talked about our own libraries and favourite books. I told her about some of the Middle English books I have from Queen's and she was really interested. She also has quite a large library, and she's thinking of getting some practice cataloguing her own books. One of her all-time favourite books is *Little Women*.

Also talked a lot to Cindy Campbell, who is in Group B. We went wandering around outside the school and talked about being outsiders.

**

Fred Merritt and I got into a discussion on subjects headings, much to Mr Alchuk's amusement. Mr A told me a bit about the library at the Art Gallery and that I wouldn't have to wear anything too dressy – what I had on was fine.

Later, we threw a party for the second year graduates, and Mr A got into an argument with David Edwards. David started talking about his lover and about relationships in general. He believes you have to have a close relationship based entirely on one person. Mr A thought this was very stifling. He pronounced with great flourish, gesturing theatrically, on the Middle Ages, asking David in a very sarcastic tone, “Why don’t you do just as they did during the Crusades, get a chastity belt and take the key with you.” I was flabbergasted to see Mr A get involved in such a discussion. Usually he eludes personal conflicts.

Except when it comes to Kim Jackson. He and Kim got into another row – or at least Kim did. She told him she didn’t like his attitude and she didn’t think she would come back next year. All he said was, “Maybe you shouldn’t come back next year.” Lynn and Mika took Kim down to the cafeteria to calm her down. I admire Kim’s spunk, though. She returned to the exam as if nothing had happened.

May 3-7

Exams. Wrote the book cataloguing exam. Nothing left inside; I have run the gamut of emotions over cataloguing. Hard to believe I could ever write a sentence like that last one! After the exam we all went to the cafeteria for coffee.

I ended up blanking out over the Ordering exam. I forgot everything. My mind was jammed with old songs. And then, as so often happens these days, tears started running down my cheeks. Mr Alchuk came over and asked if there was anything wrong. I told him I had completely blanked out. He suggested going for a walk and said I could stay after and continue. Then he said I could finish writing in Mrs Weihs’s office with a cup of coffee, in a more relaxed atmosphere. Then he took me to his office and arranged a whole new time so I could completely rewrite it. He told me it had happened to him once when he was at the U of Michigan. A professor was very good to him and made a special arrangement for him to do an oral. And so more kindness is passed on.

Got through the history exam without histrionics. Mr Giffen was unpleasant, dictatorial, snarling at us. Kim asked him why he was in such a bad mood. His face actually cracked into a reluctant smile. None of us will miss him. Last exam, Journalism. Mr Holmes sat at the front of the room not seeing any of us. Our Group of 7, sitting near the back of the class, created a hullabaloo making arrangements, hugging, kissing, saying goodbye, much to Linda Partington's exasperation. If looks could kill ...

Went to thank Andrea Jones for all her kindnesses, and ended up going out for lunch with her, Faye Zeidman, Rose, Liz Dilley, Susan Chapman and Dora Bornstein. I love hanging out with the older women. They are so intelligent and humorous. Faye, in particular, sparkled with wit. Her work placement is with the CNIB, and she is taking over her rabbi's library during the summer.

Susan Chapman is one of the most intelligent people in our class. When she found out that Ellen has a degree in Medieval Studies, she said she would have been embarrassed to get up in history class and talk about the Black Death. "Someone with a degree in Medieval Studies and me, having been just a housewife for twenty-one years. Guess I'll just eat." She deeply regrets not having finished university, and not having used her brains. These women are as bright, lively and interesting as the Group of 7, sometimes more so. After lunch, I was dropped off at Seneca, and Andrea blew me a kiss. What a lovely way to end the school year. Spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around downtown with Fred Merritt, who had waited for me, and finding the right subway station for a trial run to the Art Gallery.

**

Went to see *Coup de Torchon* with Fred (VD). A line that really struck me: "I allow people to see what their natures really are. That is my job. It's a dirty one and I hope I have the strength." The movie made me think of Jim. It is about a police chief who is degraded and humiliated and shows people their true natures. He kills them and the killing becomes easier and easier until he feels he is like Christ with a mission.

Now, walking through the streets in the rain I feel like a character in the movie, the blue light of the roads all around me, fool's gold of streetlights, liquid curbs, moving sidewalks. Raindrops streak down the windshield like comets. Office towers fade into river-running colour.

May 12

Green world, everything clear and intense as if made of glass. Everything so new and tender. Someone wearing faded jeans and a poncho made me think of the the Walk-a-thon in Grade 8. It's as if all of the 1960s were compacted into those few hours for me. I'll never forget walking down those country roads, endless walking, pit-stops in various fields. I was exhausted and exhilarated at the same time. I remember lying in a field with all of these older kids dressed in jeans and those skin-tight collarless long-sleeved shirts, older kids who symbolized freedom to me, a whole new way of doing things. And the music playing that day: Signs, Get Together, Itchy Coo Park, Draggin' the Line, Grazing in the Grass, Crystal Blue Persuasion. Such a sense of being part of a whole new generation, something so much bigger than myself.

**

Called Joanne Montemurro. I was a little apprehensive at first, since I hadn't seen much of her in second term, but I was glad I called. We talked about our work placements. They're making her photocopy things, so I guess I don't have too much to complain about. She hears Alchuk's voice in her head too, that voice that drills into our subconscious. "You're in the library world now ..."

**

Letter from Wheeze. More changes. She's now working at Douglas Library on weekends and is taking an intensive 8 week secretarial course. Sometimes I think Marsha writes letters when she reaches transition periods in her life, when she needs to convince herself of her own actions.

**

Stopped at the Village on the Grange for coffee before arriving at my work placement at the AGO. The gallery is an eerie place this early, full of phantoms, objects frozen in time and space, significantly placed, surrounded in portentous shadows. Doorways opening into dark rooms with chairs placed in front of Madonnas, tortured Christ figures, various crucifixions. I tiptoe into the back room where I toil away classifying the slide collection.

It is a beautiful workplace; big window, perfect temperature, classical music playing, people speaking quietly and courteously to each other. Here people talk about exhibitions they have seen, and studying in places like Paris or Florence. I love being around people who are more articulate and educated than myself, even if I do feel ignorant. Later in the afternoon, my supervisor Margaret Brennan invited me to see the Murray Favro exhibition with her. Margaret loves things that are peaceful, harmonious, not too disturbing. She dislikes Blake's nightmares and monsters, but loves his "Songs of Innocence" works.

Favro seems to be obsessed with objects, old objects, objects from childhood. There is something both ordinary and lurid about his work. Like an obsessive nightmare about my childhood, objects are laid out, set up almost like fetishes, tribal masks, only from the 1960s. The same synthetic colours, spent yellows and reds. Each of the objects set as if atrophied, sprayed.

The old car by the side of the road. Something threatening about it. Favro seems to take what is ordinary and renders it terrifying, isolated by colour and placement. Obsessive return to childhood life, dark and claustrophobic. The filmstrips running as part of the exhibit are crackling and fuzzy, the unreliability of memory and perception. My favourite is an grey-brown-sepia coloured filmstrip of water on rollers, rocking back and forth. Mechanized water in two ways. I could see the mechanics of the movement of water, but also movement of human intervention on water at the same time. Very cool.

Margaret said she liked that piece because she likes water. We walked through the gallery, past the Henry Moore sculptures. It was time for me to pack up and she thanked me for all the hard work I had done this week.

May 14

Met Joanne Montemurro at Kennedy exit and we walked to Johanne Cunliffe's house together. So nice to see her, to be able to laugh and talk again. Johanne lives on a street of old houses and budding trees. We came upon her sitting on her front stoop, barefooted, relaxed and approachable. Saw a more vulnerable side to her this evening. She seemed to be bending over backwards to please the rest of us.

She made us a delicious chili dinner and was informal and generous. Sometimes she gets an expression on her face as if she is deeply listening and understanding what you are saying. I think she really wants to be part of our group. I could detect a good friend under the blustery sometimes derisive and level-headed way she has of expressing herself. She even looked a little smaller tonight – not as overwhelming.

Ellen looked more sophisticated than she did at school, still freshly-scrubbed, schoolgirlish and ingenuous. "Sweet and innocent," as Lynn said. Ellen is blunt and level-headed, however, and as Marg Austin said, "looking out for all the odds." She is having a hard time at her work placement in the downtown bank. No one talks to her or lets her know how she's doing. Poor Joanne is finding it rough at hers, too. Apparently one woman has been criticizing her clothing.

Nancy told stories. I remember how keen and clear-edged she seemed to me in September. Throughout the year she became softer, looser, more relaxed. She says she has always been fascinated by boarding schools. No wonder she is so attracted to Ellen. I'm fascinated by boarding schools too, come to think of it – mostly the St Trinian's variety. I liked Lynn Sinclair very much tonight. Johanne is a very talented artist and she showed us some of her work.

Lynn drove some of us home – me to the Eglinton Station at about 2 am. Dropped Mika and Nancy off and I got to see where they lived. So interesting to see where people live in Toronto, to be able to pin-point physical locations, rather than just seeing people disappear into the maw of the subway to emerge again somewhere in Toronto – or maybe somewhere else in the universe.

**

I love going to work and being able to wandering through the galleries. Saw the painting from which the Utrillo print I sent Wheeze was taken. Enjoying Raoul Dufy today. There is one painting in which I can feel the space around me, the sea in the air, the blue. Murray Favro has turned a guitar into a weapon. Stood and gazed at the Christ figure. This Christ is transparent, multicoloured, made of of angles lines, streaks. A fractured dismembered Christ where you could see the veins of blue, red green. Fading into the background yet always present, shimmering with light. As transparent and powerful as the reflections of tree branches reaching across and breaking up the sidewalk. This is a Christ who is both hidden and everywhere, in a flash of colour, through leaves on trees; a protean generative Christ.

**

Work days do not end, they are all strung together. Each day flips into the next. Saw *Globe & Mail* art critic, Christopher Hume in the AGO, looking exactly as he does in the newspaper, only taller and blonder with a pronounced British accent.

Alex, Lynne Burry and I spent half an hour this morning sitting around at the circulation desk talking about Nazism and the Mayor of Eckville, Alberta, who is a Holocaust denier and won't resign. Alex was upset over someone he had to work with last night who said we didn't need to trouble ourselves thinking about Eckville, that we need only concern ourselves about Toronto. I'm with Alex. How can people possibly have this attitude these days?! As if we don't all infect each other with these beliefs.

Alex looks like a swashbuckler with long curly black hair, but he speaks gently, has big blue eyes and is going to cosmetology school. He shocked Norma and Margaret by saying he was going to colour his hair blue for a hair show. "You're not coming back here if you do," declared Norma.

Lynne is gentle and soft-spoken. When Norma and Margaret are around she tends to side with them and express a more conservative viewpoint. But when she's with just Alex and me it's a different story. After Norma and Margaret left, Alex, Lynne and I legalized prostitution and weed.

May 20

Last day of work placement. Margaret left me a little card and thanked me for doing such excellent work. I went into one of the galleries to have a last look at the Picassos. A security guard started talking to me, then invited me out for coffee. He had to wait until he got off work and I couldn't stay that long. His face fell when he found out today was my last day and that I lived out in Whitby. Said he had been working up the nerve all week to ask me out, and when he finally did, it turned out to be my last day. He hopes I will come back and visit.

Wandered Queen Street and found two William Goyen books on the bargain table. Sad to see these beautiful books so heavily discounted, but a great find for me. Saw Cindy Campbell's friend Eva sitting in a café. She beckoned to me and I went in and had coffee with her. She reminds me a lot of Joan Elgie, fractured, restless. Eva wants to go to Vancouver but doesn't have any money. She hates living in Toronto and is terrified about looking for a job. She abruptly switches from one topic of conversation to another and broke off in the middle of a conversation about Toronto to reiterate how bad it is to be unemployed. A friend of hers came in and joined us. Eva is creative, but ungrounded, seeking some way of centering herself – like Joan.

I told her how much I admired her ear-rings. She had made them herself and they looked Egyptian. She responded by pulling out two pairs of plastic ones from a bag and said, "Don't you like these better? I don't like the ones I have on but these are really nice." They were two discount store pieces of plastic; the ones she made were lovely. I found this very sad, disturbing, and I wondered why she was repudiating her own creativity. She walked me down to Union Station; the school year is now officially over.

**

After I finished up at the AGO, Fred and I went north, driving a narrow twisty back road somewhere in the Muskokas. Dodging rocks. Moths hitting the windshield like flakes of moonlight. A family living in a caboose half-hidden by pines. Laundry lines and children's toys. We came out of that back road onto a narrow strip bordered by a swamp. We continued twisting up through rocks and hills, surrounded by pines. Abandoned schoolhouse that looked like a cottage. Spent the night in a field surrounded by misty trees, a cedar grove, a few old tombstones half-buried in leaves. The road linked swamps, rivers, cabooses, woods, swamp and graves all together.

**

Visited the Professor in Orillia. She has taken on a lot with Ron's two girls. They seem to be mocking her at times, and Janet continues being gracious, smoothing everything over as if it is all in good fun. Trudi is thin, olive-skinned and intense. She is direct, precise and plays to win. Her voice is husky, mature. The Professor and I had a hilarious time at the pool table. Trudi wants to be taken seriously and was trying so hard to show us the proper way to play pool. The Prof and I must have been frustrating, soft-shoeing around the room with our cues, buffoon pool sharks. We hunched over the table calculating the most preposterous shots, pretending we had cigars and talking out the sides of our mouths. "Yah, Lou, I learned this trick back when I played with Fats."

Fred and I spent the night with the Pyes. Janet and Ron's bedroom door was partially open and I could see them lying in bed, Ron facing Janet, Janet with her back to Ron. Terri was sleeping in the same room, in a little bed made up on the floor. I could never have imagined the Professor in such an arrangement, it makes me think she's living some kind of Anne Tyler life, adapting and adapting as control is taken away. The Accidental Family. But her sense of humour remains as mischievous and subversive as ever. It is her outlet and her power.

When I went downstairs in the morning I caught a glimpse of Ron at the table studying his bible. He looked so private; another side to this comfortable good-natured man. The Professor suggested the four of us sneak off and play miniature golf, so the girls couldn't come. We had a lot of fun. The Professor fixed the scores and at the end the two Lous shook hands and said, "Good game, Doctor." "It must have been the practicing I did in Cairo – all those sand traps."

May 25

Invitation to Els Van Dam's boat. Met Kim at Coxwell Station. We were both early and went window-shopping in the Beaches. Kim is like quicksilver darting in and out of boutiques. While shopping, she said she wanted to get Benjamin a doll because boys can play with dolls as well as girls. I remember when we were shopping in Yorkville, she worried that one of the toys she bought for Ben might be too feminine. Neither of us had directions to Els's boat, but we brilliantly deduced it was located somewhere along the lake shore. We walked until we saw Els in the distance – thanks to my sharp eyes. Neither Kim nor I wear a watch but we both have an highly instinctive sense of time.

Els bounded over to us and escorted us to the yacht. Was delighted to see Andrea and Susan. It was a disparate group. Linda P and Lloyd, Kim and me, Betty Bennett and her husband, Rose Wilforth, David Edwards and his lover, Michael. Betty looked as formal and controlled as she did at school. Kim made some remarks about homosexuality to Rose and me, but she, David and Michael played pool. She won. Linda P mellower than usual but her hackles still rose at some of Kim's harmless remarks. Kim isn't malicious; she just says what comes to her mind at any one moment.

Later, Andrea gave us a ride home. Got to see where Linda, Rose and Susan all live. Andrea, Susan and I talked all the way to Susan's house in Unionville. I respect Susan's intelligence, humour, attention to detail, and Andrea's generosity, warmth and leadership.

The sky became dark grey, threatening. Intense shades of green, pink and white. My eyes have hungered for these colours, tired of barren pastels. I can't get enough of this vividness. Rose lives in the middle of all this colour. She is a curious person. Soft-spoken, seemingly gentle. She appears to be a drifter but is really very determined. She will not let go of the thought that library work is her destiny, even though Mr Alchuk has told her she is not suitable. Old-fashioned, like a character in a book. She is now selling purses at Eaton's and told us she doesn't want to be a "shop-girl" all her life. I have never heard anyone outside a book use that term.

Susan told us a curious story about Mr Alchuk. I suspect most stories about Mr A are curious. It seems she was at Finch Station at 8:00 one morning during her work placement time and she saw Mr Alchuk with a tall slim blondish man. They were both carrying two grocery bags. Mr A was talking and they were both walking back and forth across the platform, not going to the buses or the subway. I told her one of my Mr A on transit stories. "What a funny little man," exclaimed Susan.

The sky grew ever darker. Andrea invited me to her house for supper. Raining hard when we pulled in the driveway. Andrea told me there was an alcohol problem in her family. "You'll have to take pot-luck. I don't know what things are going to be like. I don't often have anyone over – it's because I'm ashamed," she said grimly.

She took me to the barn and introduced me to her husband Chap, her son Steve and a rather unsavoury looking neighbour. Chap was in his cups, I guessed. All I remember is his pale eyes and an Old Port cigar. Andrea introduced me as her friend and I felt honoured. We went to see the cows, many with tags on their ears. She showed me the chicks she was raising. One was lying on its side, shavings stuck to its body. She picked it up and held it to her cheek. Dead. It was all I could do to keep from weeping – I couldn't blink or my eyes would completely well up. Everything was so sad.

We ate dinner, wind moaning around the house, lamentations, rain sheeting down. She told me that Susan Chapman is separating from her husband. It's going to be done very quietly and Andrea herself didn't know about it until today. Mr Alchuk's dramatic flair notwithstanding, we are in a simple little library technician's program at a community college. Nothing big, yet these women are making real sacrifices to be in it, and to join the workforce. They are shaking things up and I have so much admiration for them.

Andrea also told me she had tried calling me several times last night to give me a ride to Els's. When she told Susan she couldn't get hold of me, Susan said, "Oh you'll have to try and get hold of Lesley." She and Andrea were truly delighted when I arrived with Kim.

June 7

Long letter from Val. She has a summer job at the McCord Museum in Montréal. She is staying at a McGill frat house and described all her housemates. Val and I do go up and down. When I am feeling good about my life, she is low. When I am low she sends a joyous piece of mail like this. She saw Jim. She says he is more mellow, and was punctual when they met. He still lives in Lachine and is in first year medical school, actually attending his classes. I want to see him. I want to go for a long walk with him and talk and laugh like old times. Does it really have to be all or nothing? Can't we just be friends? He was nice to Val so maybe he'd be receptive to seeing me. Would he welcome seeing me or would he harrumph or ent at me like I'm some sort of horrible influence come to mess up his life once more? Would he be cold? I know the answer. Stay away.

**

Called Val. She's having a rough time again. Since her last jubilant, rather frenetic letter, her boyfriend Glenn bluntly told her he doesn't have feelings for her and wants to break it off. We talked about Jim. Apparently, he told her, "By the way I'm over the Lesley phase." I am truly happy about that.

From what Val said, it seems as if their relationship has reverted to the one back in Elrond days. He comes over to the frat house every so often, stays all hours of the night – or until Val pushes him out the door. He is fascinated by Val's friend Glenn because Glenn is a Cancer. Part of me wishes there could be a place for me like the old days, that we could revive our old threesome. The other part is pulling me away from the quicksand.

June 12

Harbourfront with Fred, Sharon and Ernie. A nice harmonious day. Sharon and Ernie are both tall and they look like a golden couple. Sharon, as always, is completely unpretentious under all the makeup. Ernie is humorous and intelligent. Quirky. There is something in him that seems always ready to spring, or snap back in an unpredictable direction. We spent ages at the antique show because Ernie was looking for something and was determined not to leave until he had seen everything. He builds radios and also has a habit of bringing his radios into the kitchen, tinkering with them and then vacuuming up “the dusties” while Sharon and I are trying to talk. It seems that Sharon has forgotten that she had ever told us that she was “making do with Ernie” because she wouldn’t get anything better at her age. That has been completely expunged from her history.

She still continually talks about age and constantly reminds Marsha and me how old we are. Every birthday card has the number on it. The other thing Sharon still harps on is occupation. It has to be clear and certain in her mind what people are doing, how long they’ve been doing it and how long they intend to stay at it. She mortally insulted Sir Jefforie by asking him in a letter why he was still working at the beer store, and when was he going to move up to a higher status job. But we have a good flowing relationship. It is Marsha who sees Sharon’s depressions and mood swings. Maybe Sharon communicates with Wheeze when she is in turmoil. When the waters have calmed and harmony restored, then I pop up again. It’s a theory. I have never formed the third point on their friendship triangle – that person was Esther. I had a different circle of friends and we never lived together. There is more distance between us – healthy, I think.

Sharon and Ernie’s apartment is old and comfortable, filled with intriguing, quirky objects such as Persian carpets, an idiosyncratic collection of paintings, his shortwave radios, astronomy books and telescope. What a Gemini!

June 18

Fred and I slept out at our tree. Wonderful to hear the wind swishing through the trees, feeling breeze on my feet. Around 5:30 I was awakened by a loud chuffing sound. It frightened me and I pulled the covers over my head and eventually dozed off. Finally I propped myself up and looked out at a dream world. Silvery light, faint flush of pink in the distance, mist rising from the fields. Eerie music of hidden birds, frogs and crickets.

Two deer bounded by us. Eventually one ventured closer to the car. It felt like close encounters of the third kind. Every tiny sound we made registered. Her ears pricked and she looked up warily, ready to flee. The other came so close I pictured her nuzzling out of our hands. All day long Fred and I asked ourselves if we really saw those deer. It was as if we must return to the daylight world and forget the visions we saw.

Felt as if I blinked and was transported to Wales or Scotland, on a pilgrimage to find the holy grail. Hills appeared, so much green in golden sunlight, shimmering, rolling up and down. Where did this world come from? It just appeared all around us as if breathed into existence. We continued up and down hills, following trails, finally taking a trail that led us into the woods. We spiralled higher and higher until we found ourselves on a plateau, as if we had driven into an ancient labyrinth. I would not have been surprised to see Borges himself in the centre of it, reading tomorrow's newspaper.

At night it is a different world. A world of trails leading into the darkness of woods, deep into sandbowls, into windswept fields full of moths. A world of night people driving vehicles at night, linked only by the trails, the unnatural circles of headlights which make the simplest pattern of branches seem symbolic and mysterious. A world of searchers called out on their nocturnal journeys where the world becomes unfamiliar and wild.

**

Another book reviewer obsessed with a book's morality. Plot summaries and moral tones. I hate newspaper book reviews so much, especially the ones in *the Globe & Mail*. I am not interested in "morality." I am not interested in stock lives, petty judgments, pronouncements on rules.

Also, piss on people who see things entirely in black and white, right and wrong. Some of these people (e.g., Joe Borowski, a 64-year-old man who thinks he has the right to tell women they cannot have abortions) are pitiful. Dinosaurs who must somehow know they will eventually be forced to lumber back into the primeval swamp.

Instead of maligning and scorning the poor members of the “Moral Majority” and all upholders of phony standards everywhere, I feel they should be pitied by society. Can you even begin to imagine the task they have taken on their noble shoulders to clean up this most imperfect of worlds? Just think of the righteous who want to ban books such as *The Diviners* and *Catcher in the Rye* in schools. Even if they succeed how can they sleep at night thinking of all the degenerates who have already gone through the school system *having already read those books*. And then there is the nightmare of all those people out there getting a real education, who are not satisfied with same placebo books and movies. Right now, there are people passing *ideas* on to their children.

Oh my god, the god who created the earth to be free of sexuality, emotion and feeling! Oh great god who created one religion, one morality for everyone on this planet to follow, who created the Plain Truth! What can be done? How can we, your true followers be more vigilant? How can good people like Joe Borowski sleep at night knowing Abortionists (just like Communists) not only lie under beds but also skulk around at night erecting abortion clinics? Has he never seen people led by Henry Morgenthauer coming and going in the dead of night carrying planks, hammers, saws to fill the country with their clinics?

Let us all utter a prayer and perhaps shed a tear for these poor Borowskivites faced with the world of today. They know their time is up and it makes them yell louder and hate harder. No matter how many battles they win today, the war is over in the long-term.

**

Thinking about library work. Everyone in my program has a double life. Very few chose it first. Most of us have come to it in a round-about way and many of us are wondering if we even want to do it, if we're not wasting time and money. It's an illusory occupation, for so many of us a halfway point between what we really want to and what we really don't want to do. A compromise, or maybe a balance, occupation.

June 24 weekend

En route to Montréal for la fête nationale / St-Jean-de-Baptiste holiday. One of my favourite journeys along Highway 2 from Kingston to the city. Curved along the river, water glowing in the moonlight. Walked through a trail of silvery sumac trees down to the water. Three tiny treasure islands. Lights of a house like the glow of a distant fire. Back on the road, places keep vanishing into the darkness, sinking behind us. I couldn't identify the towns tonight, kept mistaking one place for another as if they had all got up and changed places.

**

Visited Fred's mother and an aunt on his father's side Fred had never met. All my joy at being in Montréal disappeared. I withdrew into the sand, waving pincers about like a little crab. The Valkyrie's house bulges with accumulated junk, physical and emotional; dates, facts, trivia. In the face of this I have nothing to contribute. My mind shuts off, leaving my mouth free to utter polite banalities without adding one extra word, not one shading, tone, colour.

Val phoned me at the Valkyrie's house and asked to speak to me. The Valkyrie was very rude and told Val she would NOT be able to talk to me because SHE wanted to see us and I had to spend ALL MY TIME with this aunt. This was absurd - no one in that room was interested in talking to me. Just another power play. I went upstairs, took the phone into the bathroom, called Val back and made arrangements to meet. When I returned the Valkyrie was going on about a piece of furniture (maybe a table) she HAD TO repossess from Fred's father's house in Ottawa. I fell asleep sitting up on the couch.

**

Freedom. Roaming the city. A prostitute stood on rue Ste-Catherine stopping cars at 6 pm – only those cars containing lone men. The sun was warm, her face was open and she laughed with humour and embarrassment. Then we saw a woman, tall and lean, dressed in skin-tight black, heavy studded belt, boots, her hair dyed red, cut short and swept back from her face. I admired the way she stalked and prowled so lean and lithe. Lighted window with a dressmaker's dummy in it, black velvet torso, a talisman for this night.

All over the city streets were closed, preparing for the fête. Cobblestoned squares embedded in the heart of the city, set between modern apartments and dark old row-houses. Streets in Lachine, Dorval, Ste-Anne closed off, flags flying, portable bandshells erected. No events yet, no people. It was as if the towns were holding festivals for themselves without inviting any of the human inhabitants.

Went to St-Denis. The evening started off playful, fanciful, a mellow drunken feeling of camaraderie. We sat in a café drinking white wine watching a whole world of clowns and jugglers, artists, Dionysians walk by the window. A carnival world of music, dancing. After eating we took the Metro to Vieux-Montréal. The tone of the evening changed. The gaiety became chaos, the freedom destructive. People filled the Metro station, excitable, restless, roiling like dark clouds. I could feel my own blood boiling, responding to the crowd. I laughed as crowds marauded Place Jacques Cartier. Let the revolution begin! Then a cloudburst, rain lashing the cobblestones. People leaped into cafés, huddled in doorways, raced out into the night with jackets over their heads.

**

Finally got to see Val at her frat house and it was a treat. Enjoyed her company. She was bright and lively and we were able to connect as friends. As we were talking she started singing the chorus to "Sweet Transvestite" from Rocky Horror Picture Show. I joined in, and it felt like old times. She thinks she is in love again. This time with Emile and her talk was full of him, hopes, dreams, pessimism. She was alarmed by his coldness. He had secluded himself from her and she was spending the day trying to think of things to do so she would not obsess over him. I guess this is where I came in.

Met the infamous Glenn, a twenty year-old who looks twenty-five. According to Val, Jim is fascinated by him because he's a Cancer. Glenn seemed charming and mature at first, but it didn't take long to realize there is something shaky about him, something insecure and manipulative.

Val, Fred and I wandered over to Place St-Arthur, another cobblestoned area in the heart of Montréal. Then down St-Denis where we found a café, Le Croissanterie, where we could drink café au lait, Pernod and talk.

Val has undergone a great many transformations, which are always reflected in her appearance. She looks smaller than last time I saw her. Smaller and more vulnerable, her hair fringes her forehead, softening the edge that sometimes appears in her eyes. But no matter how vivacious, even brassy she can be on the outside, there is something inside her that has to suffer. The shellacked smile hides a lot of pain, and she never loses awareness of her inner world or emotional climate. She never truly relaxes, something inside remains ever vigilant, ready to snag on a cold word, a change in temperature, apprehend a suspect phrase. She is ready to plummet inside when the atmosphere changes, when she finally senses the slight she is unconsciously seeking. Today she is focused on Emile, so the three of us had good friend together.

We returned to Sigma Chi and John, Val, Fred and I reminisced about Queen's in someone's room, trying to top each other with our rowdy slacker student stories. It was time to leave. Val and I embraced. Another violent lightning storm, but Fred and I weren't leaving the city without bagels.

Funny how we never seem to achieve what we think are our deepest desires. Val wants a warm loving intense relationship yet finds herself continually attracted to cold undemonstrative men, re-enacting the drama of being rejected, unloved, the child of cold unresponsive parents. She chooses men who will reject her so she will suffer and be an orphan in the house of love. Val constantly says she envies my relationship with Fred. I envy her her job at the McCord Museum, and coming to Montréal.

**

Fred quit his job due to irreconcilable differences with his boss, Stuart Blower, a bitter little nowhere man. Right now I am feeling the "unbearable lightness of being," as if the bottom has dropped out of our straw lives.

June 29

Received a letter from Fred Merritt! It was very touching and articulate. He told me how much my birthday card had meant to him.

I am in a weepy mood tonight where I feel everything. Everything hurts deep inside. A woman on the street moves brusquely away from her child. I can feel the suppressed anger and that almost starts me weeping. I can't separate myself from anything tonight. The janitor passes and gives me a dirty look and it cuts me.

Fred Merritt is given an interview at a library. He scores all As on all his tests. He is asked back for a second interview, and after all that, is still not given the job. He was so happy at having been given a chance! I did start weeping at that. I hope he never ever loses that positive outlook. It's his protection. FM has epilepsy, and I really hope someone will be able to see past that and give him a job he deserves.

July 7

Marsha called, a beleaguered Wheeze who having problems with John's sister (her ex-roommate after she moved out of John's apartment). She tends to call me when things have exploded with other people. It is bemusing to be with Wheeze and Sharon or being with Wheeze and Val. The missing third person seems to haunt me. When Wheeze, Sharon and I are together, it is a group formed against Val, a joining of forces, as if repudiating Val's emotional excesses. Yet Val's figure is always there for me, and I find myself missing her vivacity and eccentricities.

When Wheeze, Val and I are together it is a joining of forces of lively brown-haired, brown-eyed women. Vivacity, liveliness wins out, excess of all types. Then I see the missing figure of Sharon looming over us, excluded, reproachful, Puritanical. But also missing her flow of conversation and interest in a larger world than Val's emotional sphere.

July 8

Kingston. Marsha back living with John again. There were terrible scenes with his sister Sylvia while they were living together on Emily Street. There were mice in the apartment and for an obscure reason, Sylvia refused to do anything about it and would not let Marsha have them exterminated. The whole apartment was constantly being rearranged, dominated by Sylvia's eccentric habits. Marsha had no say in anything.

Any time Marsha did protest, Sylvia became hysterical and accused Marsha of being an ingrate! Sylvia spent three days cleaning the apartment for a friend who was coming to visit for a few hours. She spent over \$50 on a lace tablecloth, cut flowers and new dishes just for the dinner. Marsha knew the end had come with the mouse. Sylvia called Marsha a bitch and accused her of not paying her share. Marsha remained controlled and just said, "Well Sylvia, there are a lot of things I could say to you – but you're not worth it." Then she left with John. She sneaked back one night and moved her belongings out. She stuck it out for four months and now she is back with John. I am guessing John isn't very close to this sister.

Also found out that Sylvia likes Fred and me and detests Ernie and Sharon, especially Ernie. John thinks Sharon is very peculiar and that Ernie is "flaky." Marsha doesn't seem to care for Ernie either. She agrees with me that it won't be long until Sharon turns on him.

**

Curious story about Sharon. When we went to Harbourfront Sharon had been in good health and spirits. She mentioned having been sick but it was some kind of thyroid problem and was now over. Then she told me that Ernie had been worried. He thought it was cancer and wanted to take her to a specialist. She scoffed and said she knew it couldn't be cancer, that she would have known it without a doubt. Last night Marsha told me Sharon had called her, was very glum and intoned, "We both know what I've got, don't we." She said it was only a matter of time and it seemed to be up, just when her life was improving. This story confirms for me that Sharon has two faces and she turns her day side to me, and lucky Wheeze always gets the night side.

**

Last night we drank wine and went for a walk down by the lake. Marsha was in a receptive mood and it was a beautiful night. We sat on the dock at the yacht club, feeling as if we were actually on a boat watching lights twinkling from the shore. The mood of the evening changed when we went to Chez Piggy. Wheeze and I ordered drinks, Casablanca Cooler and Leather Alice with Spurs. They were appalling, worst drinks we've ever tried to down. We took the drinks outside, cadged a glass full of ice-cubes from the bemused bartender and dared each other to take long sips. Then we had the inspired idea of mixing the two drinks together. Went to the New Garden to kill the taste of the drinks with Chinese food.

**

Picnic on Wolfe Island. We spread out two blankets and set up a feast in a graveyard. While we were there, two cars full of people came within half an hour of each other to pay their respects. If questioned, we were going to tell them we were partaking of a Dionysian mourning ritual – respecting the dead in our own way. On the ferry back, some men played bagpipes. Another man brought out a big bass drum and people danced jigs. You know you're in Kingston when ...

From the ferry to the Queen's Pub. A group of guys came in dressed only in boxer shorts and expensive ties. They romped on the dance floor, swung around like apes, adorning their heads with popcorn containers and plastic bags. There is nothing safer than a university pub where the antics are student pranks, the mischief is controlled and regulated by AMS constables. Our conversation flared and died again. After a while we felt we no longer fit in the student pub and left.

**

Watched *Swamp Thing* on TV. Marsha's friend, May Fern, came over with egg rolls. May's parents have disowned her because she does not obey her parents in every way and she was taught to be subservient. Mr Fern refers to her as his problem child because she has a mind of her own. This means that as soon as she finds her own place, she will no longer be able to visit her parents. She also has to kowtow to her 13 year-old brother who behaves like a mandarin, throwing tantrums whenever he doesn't get his way.

Marsha has a good story though. She was over at May's house when he threw one of his tantrums. Marsha told him that if he didn't stop it immediately she would clobber him. This startled him and he stopped. Then he told her she was ugly and all girls were stupid. Marsha then said that ugly or not, she could and would clobber him. He slink out of the room.

Marsha relishes her virility, clearly sees herself as a fighter. She has mentioned a few times that her father raised a family of fighters. She loves telling stories in which she has told off obnoxious patrons in the library, how others come to her when they need a champion.

Wheeze and I drank wine and talked. She told more stories about her father, his erratic tirades, self-destructive temper much like Boot's. Because Marsha did not like two photos of Derek and Donna Lee, Mr Smith flew into a rage, ripped up the photos and stormed upstairs. The last time Marsha went to Niagara Falls the visit only lasted until Saturday morning.

Fred and I lingered with Marsha and John until Monday because I hoped to find out what happened to my Queen's diploma, which has gone AWOL. Turns out they mailed it to my old address at Elrond, which doesn't exist any more and it was never returned to Richardson Hall. So, arranged to receive a new one with the Whitby address.

**

A few touching moments on Friday when we first arrived in Kingston. Wheeze gave me a graduation present, a wizard figurine. She also made me a graduation cake. In spite of her rebellions she is very traditional. She took her own graduation seriously, had both hers and John's diplomas framed. Another touching moment occurred when Wheeze asked me to look at a quilt she had picked out as a wedding present for Sharon. She kept asking if I thought Sharon would like it. When we sat down at the table, John said he thought Ernie was "flaky" and Sharon was "very peculiar." Wheeze nodded, agreed and said, "Yup, Sharon is peculiar – but we love her anyway."

[July]

Fred and I went camping at Silent Lake Provincial Park, somewhere between Peterborough and Algonquin Park. Midnight swim, loon laughter! Walked around to the other side of the beach and saw birch trees arched over empty canoes on the still surface of the water. Shone a light in the shallow water at the shore and saw several crayfish. I thought of the Moon Tarot card. The moon, the two towers, water, crab emerging from the underworld.

**

Drive into the trails. One of those nights where everything seems strange, watchful, uncanny. Headlights illuminating some trees and bushes, concealing others. We drove to our enchanted place by the tree, but this night it seemed unfamiliar. Things hidden in grass, under leaves, rustling, whirring, whispering. Inky sky. Suddenly a giant wooden cross loomed up in front of us, one we had never seen there before. I was terrified. Talk about symbols that affect us deeply inside.

**

Finally received my diploma. I officially have a BA in Arts from Queen's University. I guess it's an accomplishment of some sort.

**

Went to an anti-cruise missile demonstration in Toronto. Someone must stop this madness, make at least a symbolic gesture of disapproval. Unfortunately I missed the march, which was the highlight. About 2,000 people gathered at city hall. So absorbed in people-watching I almost forgot why I was there. There were "crunchy granolas," people with long hair, long dresses, sandals. Also skinheads dressed in combat boots, chains, studded belts.

Women's groups, students, church groups, university groups (no one representing Queen's, heaven forbid). And over there, the Communist Party of Canada. Met up with Johanne Cunliffe and her friend Rob. Andrea once said she found Johanne's views rigid, but I think J is a lot more approachable than she appears at first. I do know Johanne's father is very dogmatic, so this is perhaps where she developed this persona. He did not want J to go to any demonstration if she was going to break the law.

**

Trip to Montréal. This time we decided to be adventurous and rented a small room on the corner of rue Mont Royal and rue de la France. A small oddly-shaped roomt that smelled like my grandparents' farm and similar furniture, including an old iron bed and chair. I felt like a Victorian girl sitting by the large windows in my secret room, looking out over the city. It is a larger building inside than it appears from the street. The buildings on this block look one dimensional, collapsible as movie sets, yet when you venture inside, they are full of rooms, hallways, staircases, balconies. The wind is coming in through the window as I write, along with glimmering streaks of rain.

Strange dark night, though. Felt alone lying in this unfamiliar bed, hearing noises in the dark, footsteps outside the door. Went to the bathroom in the sink inside the room because I was afraid to leave the room and use the one down the hall.

This trip has been different from past ones. This time it's a dark journey. The atmosphere is different and rather frightening. Went to see a movie, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, then to rue St-Denis for wine at a favourite café. The crowds tonight seemed voracious, too close somehow. Wandered up Ste-Catherine and I got sick on the steps of Place Desjardins. I felt as if I had somehow triggered something I couldn't control. The evening went wild and I whirled into the maelstrom.

Became sick again and sat down on the steps at a Harvey's to recuperate. A man came and told Fred that he would have to move me because the sight of me was driving away his clients, and the police might come over and give him trouble! Then I noticed all the prostitutes coming out of the tourist rooms, which were right beside the Harvey's and finally realized this craven little man was a pimp. I couldn't move and the man conferred with his enforcer. The enforcer realized I wasn't exactly sitting there trying to scare his clients away and they eventually left me alone.

We walked around some more and sat down on a bench. 4:30 am and there were old women out walking, young children playing, people riding bikes. This city never shuts down. A Monday night here is like a Friday night anywhere else. Usually I love this about the city, but the pace was too fast tonight, the tempo making me crazy.

Around 5 am we crept back upstairs to our room – just in time to see a prostitute walking a client down the stairs. I lay on the bed, curtains swaying like ghosts in the wind., eventually drifting into nowhere.

**

Drive to la Rivière Rouge. It sprinkled rain all day, which made the countryside beautiful. Glowing colours, a tender second spring. Shining blue roads. It was as if the light was emanating from the ground, pulsing through the grass. Passed huge churches and roadside shrines. Crucifixions eternally enacted by the sides of roads, in crossroads, lonely corners. Deep red hearts and wounds on the very white flesh of Christ.

**

Rain, dark rush of wind. Creaking, groaning. Catacombs outside the window, spiral staircases. Went for a late-night walk. Tonight, everything gentle in moonlight, a swoop of silver as staircases curl up into the buildings. I'm in the middle of puzzle-boxes, windows, staircase mazes leading to opened doors and windows, in turn leading to people living private lives for the public in summer. A quiet touch of shadow on a car parked in a yard. A boat docked on another small square of grass, a boat. Glimmer of a swimming pool. How I would love to slip into the water without anyone knowing I was there.

Walk up the mountain. In front of me people spoke French, behind me, English. I was mute, not wanting to open my mouth and have English come out of it. Everywhere I go, including the West Island, people speak to me in French and I despair because I cannot get my French out quickly enough. It is always drowned out by English. Yet this city is the one place I want to live. Whenever I have to leave I feel as if I'm being torn away by the roots.

Saw *The King of Comedy* at Cinema V. The movie was full of glass, chrome, mirrors, giving back only what you send out, a shallow world of images. People trapped in images. Apartment buildings are made of glass, splashed with light like tumblers filled with chic drinks; daiquiri buildings, martini apartments.

Science-fiction settings with eerie colours, sterile lighting, Muzak that could have come straight from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. A black and white audience cheers and recedes. A world of no integrity, no center, no values. Celebrity rather than intimacy. A selling of oneself, total accommodation, echo chambers where emotion and genuine thought are instantly erased. Soundproof chambers where no one can be reached except by some random act of violence. "Better to be king for a night than schmuck for a lifetime." Good, thought-provoking movie.

**

Not happy to be back in Duckburg. Quack quack.

Aug. 6

Sharon's wedding today. She is actually getting married to Ernie. Wheeze and I have been dubious for a long time, but here it is. Wheeze called at 9 am to say she had arrived at the train station in Oshawa. Fred picked her up and she came flapping in with cards, wrapping paper, a bottle of liqueur for me and a bottle of champagne for Sharon. We drank wine and whiled away the afternoon, then the three of us napped on the waterbed. Then to the big event. About an hour before the wedding in Islington, we stopped at an old-fashioned bar named Muddy's, beautifully renovated with antique furniture, like a genteel Victorian drawing room.

Marsha and I bumbled in, larger than life, with Fred in tow. Wheeze ordered Black Russians, Fred and I had wine. It was 2-for-1 day. Wheeze's Black Russians turned out to be doubles and our wine came in glasses as big as fishbowls, glasses that clanked when we toasted Sharon. Marsha said, "We've had some huge fights in the past but I really do wish her all the happiness in the world. She always goes about it the long and hard way and I hope the way becomes a little shorter. Here's to Shrinne-Shrinne. She means a lot to me."

Back out in the heat. Marsha and I were corked, euphoric in the car. We picked up Jan Maclean, a Queen's friend of Sharon and Marsha. She is a folksinger and will be performing at the wedding. She was just as lovely as Wheeze had described.

The wedding took place at a historical inn in Islington, a lovely park setting. Wheeze, Jan and I talked until Sharon's yuppie friends Stephanie and Stephen approached. We were introduced and Stephanie said in an ice-pick voice, "Yes, we've met." After an awkward pause, Wheeze, Jan and I turned our backs and set off down the path, not intentionally setting out to snub Stephanie but not feeling any regret over doing so. "I think we just committed a faux pas," I said. "I think we are walking faux pas's," Marsha replied.

Sharon's older sister Gail is small-boned, dainty even. She looks younger than Sharon except for the lines around her eyes and the tidiness of her features. She thrust her camera at me and asked if I could take pictures, of anything, because none of her pictures ever turn out. I also sense something no-nonsense about Gail and I bumbled around taking pictures of what I thought might interest Gail, whom I've only met once before today.

The ceremony was short and very nice. Sharon wore her mother's wedding dress for the ceremony with a garland of flowers around her head. She looked lovely. Sharon had arranged all the tables herself, doing her best to match personalities. Wheeze, Fred, Jan and I were placed with Sharon's friends from Prescott. We all got along great. Our place cards actually said "Bat" and "Wheeze."

Met Roma, one of Sharon's colleagues, who asked, "Which one are you – Wheeze or Bat?" I identified myself and she said she knew I had to be one or the other. Almost makes me feel famous!

Sharon looked beautiful, a heart-aching expression on her face. Marsha started to cry and that set me off. Everyone at the table talked about how far Sharon had come, how she had changed over the years.

Wheeze beckoned to me and she, Janet and I went outside and sat on the steps. Jan played her guitar and sang. It was all so beautiful. Warm and sultry, crickets. Jan's songs were old and familiar and people came out and joined in, just like Walt Disney forest-creatures. Jan must have sung these songs a million times but she was feeling every word she sang, her voice warm and intimate. Even Ernie's Edward Gorey-esque brother came out. He chain-smoked and sat apart from the rest of us, locked into his suit. He actually joined in on a chorus or two and said this was a "mystical experience."

Jan told me I looked European with my colouring, that I could easily pass for being French. I mentioned how everyone in Montréal speaks to me in French, even on the West Island. She said it was because I looked French. A sure way to get me purring!

Dancing. Wheeze, Sharon and I danced. Wheeze flirted with Sharon's silent brother Jim. Sharon's sister accosted the Wheeze and jived with her in the hall. Then all the Queen's people got up and did an "Oil Thigh." We stayed until the very end and helped Sharon and Ernie load up the car then dropped Jan off at her friend's house. It was a lovely day. I would love to see Jan again.

Aug. 7

Called Sharon and we talked for 2 hours about the wedding, etc. She is afraid she will have problems with her in-laws. There are a great many parallels between her family and mine, Ernie's family and Fred's. Ernie comes from a curiously isolated family and the brothers are very inhibited. Mrs Musgrave really only sees her family, no one visits. Ernie is a curious person, switching careers, never settling for anything long. He flunked out of university in his first year, then passed and went for ten years. He did a number of jobs, at one point, managing a massage parlour.

He is on edge all the time and was taught to have a suspicious mind. Sharon thinks he will relax when he is exposed to her friends and he finds that people don't have expectations of what he should be. Ernie's family is still at the stage where every member plays a role, and they haven't yet seen themselves as individuals beyond those roles. Ernie's family and Sharon's family are worlds apart, again resembling my situation with Fred.

**

The Professor called and I am in another galaxy with a whole different set of rules, expressions, time and space. The Sharon-Wheeze influence drops away as I adapt to the Professor's tone. She is always gracious but very quickly and firmly takes control of the conversation, managing, organizing. Rosalind is getting married on Monday and the Good Friends Association is getting together to give her a shower.

**

Called Sir J. He had company and returned my call at midnight. It was a good conversation – as if no time had passed since we last talked. He knew about Rosalind’s wedding, that it is to be held on Monday, which is some kind of Catholic sacred day. He was in Dallas again. Dallas is to him what Montréal is to me.

Aug. 12-15

Barrie. My father’s health has improved, I think. He looks much fitter to me. Had a lively spirited time until the jokes turned into derision. My mother launched into a venomous diatribe against Nancy. Because that’s what she does – turns on you. Just being in Barrie is stifling, this bedrock of conservatism, entrenched viewpoints that have no relationship to myself or my life. It’s like being forced back into an old photo, all the more painful if you never fit into the photo in the first place. My mother goes on and on about how great it is that Joyce Hopwood is getting married because she is the oldest girl.

Then there’s Chris Hopwood saying it’s not right for Bob and Donna Boden to live apart because they were joined together by god. Every time I visit Barrie, everything I have come to value or have acquired drops away. I have no way of responding and I stare at them, a world apart. Too often I answer sarcastically and only a second or so later realize they were completely serious and I’m a Thanksgiving turkey walking into the pot every year.

It is amusing, irritating and a little troublesome the way Boot manipulates me to get what she wants from the parents. She wanted a waterbed, knew they wouldn’t allow such a thing in the house, and waited until I showed up to get one, knowing I would give moral support. I ended up saying the expected thing, that waterbeds are lovely, the objections to them are not valid, that she should trust her own instincts, etc. etc. I said what I was programmed to say, making my entrance onstage when the play is in progress, the characters are all costumed and set in their appropriate attitudes. I deliver the same lines as always, manipulated on all sides by what I am expected to say and do, then I wander off again to sparse and scattered applause, catcalls or completely noticed. Exeunt.

I don't mind being manipulated over a waterbed. It gets worrisome when she expects me to keep defending her decision to not go back to school. That is a different story and I deeply dislike being put in that position.

**

Went to the Nazarene Church. Jerry Steingard did the service. He has an easy natural way of talking to people. The service was uplifting and it struck me just how much I missed being around people who are kind and courteous. When Jerry said he was amazed at how each person was unique, individual and what a miracle it was for each and every person to exist, I almost started to cry, feeling as if I had come home. Chris was also at the service and we embraced. She looks healthier than last time we met. She was sitting with Gord Harris who has become her best friend over the summer. He means a lot to her. She was thrilled to see Jerry again, though. I noticed the spark in her eyes when she talked about him.

Bob Boden has left the ministry, in Toronto now looking for a new job. Chris thinks he burned out. He had been police chaplain, chaplain for one of the high schools, plus called in for 3 community emergencies. All this above his regular duties as Nazarene Church pastor. Also, he and Donna are undergoing a trial separation as Bob said he needed space. Donna confided to Chris that she didn't think she could reach him any more. As his depression deepened his sermons became more introverted, more focused on himself and his struggles and he simply couldn't help others any more. I remember seeing Donna last year and thinking she looked tired, dispirited, even angry or resentful. Even then I knew all was not well. Jerry has been serving as interim preacher.

Visited Chris in the afternoon. Marg and Ruth Anne Smith were there, but I didn't get to see Bernie. Apparently he thinks he is getting old. As if! Chris focuses in so intensely. Her eyes even bluer than I remember. She's a little unnerving, but a kindred spirit. When we have differences of opinion, we have both learned to tread lightly. She and Kevin broke up in January because they were as different as night and day. He was optimistic and good-humoured all the time, joking and rarely serious. He didn't like reading, or discussing ideas.

**

Stopped in to see Rosalind on our way out of Barrie. The Cotter living room was crammed with people. Her father, dressed in a dark suit, looked very patriarchal. According to Sir J, he is always writing fire-and-brimstone letters to the Barrie Examiner. All Roz's sisters came in dressed in lacy blouses, sashes, flowy skirts. They have grown so much I could not begin to remember who they all were. Becky was there. She was always one of my favourite people.

The house itself was oppressive with very heavy dark furniture, a crucifix on the wall, stiff-backed Victorian chairs that made me think of guillotines. Gilt-framed paintings looking as if they could bring the whole wall down. In fact, every object in the room was heavy and oppressive. But Rosalind ... oh my. She was delighted to see me and we embraced. She asked if I was going to the wedding and said pleadingly, "Come! Please come – oh do!" She looked pale and cold and gaunt, her eyes grey as the sea but red-rimmed. Brian looked like a young minister. I gather he is very serious, prone to periods of melancholy, debilitating migraines.

Poor Rosalind looked more like she was going to a funeral than to a wedding rehearsal. She asked me several times if I had been nervous and seemed relieved when I said I shook the entire night before my wedding. After we left the house, I felt as if we were abandoning her to some horrible fate. I can't help but wish she would turn and run. But I'm not the most respectful of the marriage convention.

**

We returned to Whitby but I couldn't sleep and talked Fred into coming up again to see the wedding. The church appeared to be abandoned. Luckily someone was at the door. She told us the wedding had been called off, postponed at midnight. "The reason was not known." (Or given.)

Aug. 16

Talked to Janet. Mr Cotter called her at midnight to tell her that Rosalind couldn't go through with it, that "she was very confused." Ros left for her room in Toronto to think things out. The Professor said Rosalind was very courageous to call it off at the last minute rather than do something she would regret. I couldn't agree with her more. Janet herself was courageous enough to go out with Mr Beltz in the face of her father's opposition. She broke up with Frank and went out with his best friend Ron because it was right. And so, she was the first to offer support to Rosalind. Janet also thinks Ros and Brian don't know each other very well. I noticed at the house that they didn't move as if they knew each other. There were no little signals, gestures. They did not fall into a rhythm as friends do. They sat apart and moved around each other like strangers. I could see nothing between them except a family/religious arrangement.

**

Janet called again. Rosalind's mother called her with the news that Rosalind married Reverend Dimmesdale after all. The wedding took place last night. Hardly anyone was there. I don't have a good feeling about this.

Aug. 25

The books I have been reading lately all seem to be concerned with the breakdown of reality, what is reality and what is illusion, the dialectic between the real self and the image, loss of identity, loss of humanity. *Ice* by Anna Kavan is startling, full of brittle imagery. I read it as a story of exile, loss of the individual self that is vulnerable and the terror of encroaching ice. So many passages are beautiful, frightening, brilliant, sustained like frozen music, swirling colours like Northern lights embedded in ice, all against an utterly black background.

Asylum Piece is also frightening and heartbreaking, a cry for mercy in a world where those who are perceived weak are locked away and persecuted. Kavan has the ability to transmute the smallest scene in daily life into a haunting vision, a nightmare in a business suit, menace in a sunny garden. She exposes the undertow running below our shallow daily lives.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman by Angela Carter deals with war fought against one Dr Hoffman, who sets out to demolish the structure of time, of reason and fill the world with mirages and illusions, where all the people of the world would surrender to the flux of mirages, liberated from the structure of time. The book, more detailed and analytical than Kavan's work, stretches the boundary of the self through adventures, incarnations. A new self develops for every adventure. A new self with new companions and incarnations until there is nothing left except a false self that is turned into a statue and memorialized while the "real" person withers into cynicism or despair.

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A pleasant surprise. Ellen called to invite me to her pool party on Friday night. It will be so good to be part of the Group of 7 again.

Aug. 26

Set out for Ellen's pool party, and it turned out to be quite a pilgrimage. Fred drove me to Pickering Station and we ran into Al Leake as I was ready to embark for Islington. He looked exactly the same, tanned and fit, shirt undone, casual shoulder bag. He teaches at Herzing Institute now. We didn't have too long to talk but he took down my address (again) and Fred gave him a ride to his parents' house. I ended up at Union Station at 7:20. I called Ellen and she was in a good mood. I misinterpreted her directions and ended up wandering lost in Islington.

Ellen's house looks much as I had pictured it, large two-storey, white with discreet navy blue curtains. The furniture was simple and elegant. The house was dark when I arrived and I panicked, not at all sure what time it was when I finally rang the doorbell. I had convinced myself it was 4 am, the party long over, Ellen appearing at the door in her nightgown. But she looked completely normal. All the lost hours returned to where they were supposed to be after my imagination went hurtling through a time tunnel. Everything was as it should be with everyone gathered in one of the rooms.

The only one missing was Joanne, who was sick. She is always the first person I look for when we get together. If she is not there I feel a little lost, walking into water of an uncertain shifting temperature. Sometimes it even seems as if Joanne is my passport to this country and without it I could be deported. However, I got a warm welcome from Nancy and Kim and the evening turned out to be so delightful it was worth all the misadventures.

I love swimming at night. The four who remained longest in the pool were the water signs, Mika, Nancy, Johanne and me. Maybe it was the presence of water, but everyone was so much more open and animated than at school. Ellen was lovely, bringing us wine, beer, coffee and treats. Best of all were conversations with Nancy and Johanne. Nancy looked so different, vulnerable with her glasses off and wet hair slicked back. Mika and Nancy also got Bs in Ordering. We were complaining about Mr Alchuk. Mika turned to me and said, "Hah, he likes *you*!"

Johanne and Ellen got into an argument about nuclear disarmament, in which Ellen actually declared she would rather be dead than a communist. Johanne and I had a good talk on the subject. I told her about reading Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*. How there is nothing in the world any more to fight about. None of the old ideas exist any more in reality: nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, communism, capitalism. None of the "isms" exist any more in a pure sense. If we were "taken over by the Russians," what kind of a communist system would it be? Would the whole capitalist system be destroyed in ten years, people banished from the metropolises and sent to collective farms? You cannot impose a completely foreign system on a country and expect it to work. Communist regimes are all different. How could America ever become a pure communist system?

The world has changed but people are so far behind the times. We are all in the same boat, all suffering economic depression, ennui, collapse of values that, because they were never real in the first place, could not last and had to be rebelled against. Anything they had to say to justify a war simply does not apply any more. The world they see does not exist any more, and maybe never did.

Good conversations tonight. Only Kim appeared out of her depth. She also dislikes swimming, was the last one in and paddled around with her head above water. Eventually Nancy drove Kim and me back to Kim's, where I stayed the night. Another good talk in the car. I really like Nancy, a lot of depth to her.

Lingered for a while at Kim's before heading back to Whitby, and met a friend of hers named Jessie, from Montréal. Benjamin has grown so much since I last saw him. Brown from the sun with startling white hair. He was rambunctious and contrary this morning and Kim expects a lot from him. He has to reach up for her because she won't come down to him. Sometimes it seems as if he is just reaching into air. She lent me shorts and a t-shirt to wear on the bus so I wouldn't be too hot. She also sent me off with a little lunch, which was very touching. Once Kim is in momentum she is practically unstoppable. The heat and utter stillness waiting for the train at Rouge Hill Station was such a contrast to the sweaty turmoil of last night, over-caffeinated on Benjamin's bed with Sesame Street characters reflecting moving lights from the street below.

Aug. 29

To Seneca for registration. The Group of 7 met but we were more formal with each other again, our school facades firmly in place. Talked a bit with Mary Maleki, from the other class. She had enjoyed her summer job at the Legislative Library. Her little son with with her. He was bright and lively and they are affectionate with each other. We walked together to the registration room until I was joined by Kim, Sharon Cooper and Maria Buisman. I ended up in line with Faye "Dr" Zeidman, Dora Bornstein and Andrea Jones. Andrea was looking good. Made Dora laugh by doing an impression of Mr Alchuk in his white shirt, hair cut, "Sun-In" rinse.

The Group went for coffee and we hid in the bathroom trying to shake Fred Merritt. At the cafeteria, Joanne grabbed my arm and said, "Lesley!" I responded in kind, really glad to see her. I was afraid she might not come back. Linda Partington was obviously offended or irritated by the gesture, for she gave us one of her looks and got up and left with Els. Poor upright uptight Ms Partington, all alone in a sea of yahoos. Later, we went for beer. Joanne drove me to Shepherd Station. She was as as bright, funny and sensitive as ever.

Sept. (Labour Day weekend)

Montréal again. Waiting in a dark alley for Fred to make a phone call. Alternating darkness, glimmering, motion, doors opening, closing, garbage bags crinkling with light, whispering poplars, maple leaves drifting to the ground. Shaking, tinkling, rustling. Railings of sleek light. A window appears, selected by light, a shape condensed as a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. Geometric designs as if the buildings were all created out of darkness and light. Heads of people appear in windows, luminous and floating, unattached to bodies.

Every trip to Montréal is different. Last trip was fast-paced, chaotic. This trip more leisurely. More West Island, slower, respectable, anglo.

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Trip to Smuggler's Notch, Vermont. Season of shadows, deep shadows tucked away in crevices. Sky is cool blue with mountains wavering in the distance until they're floating into infinity. Still warm outside, but the air has a tang to it. Turn a corner and there is another white frame church cradled by clay mountains. Everything a little bit distant, just out of reach.

Sept. 5

Second year begins. Mr Alchuk is such a rococo-man, standing at the front of the room, presiding over us all, his exaggerated gestures curving, sweeping. He has cut and lightened his hair so it shimmers. He is a little cooler with us this year, seems to fold up as he shoulders his way past the Group of 7 clustered at the doorway. He alternates between 3 shirts. One is plain white and he stands up front, raising his arms like a guru. He has also been unbearably repetitive and didactic these days. Years from now I will feel his voice drilling into my skull.

So far enjoying Ms Dodd's class. Reference is my only hope. If I don't enjoy that, I don't know what i'll do. I have no aptitude for cataloguing or ordering. She still looks like a tough old tortoise, mouth set like a trap, eyes peering from heavy lids.

What made me think I would be suitable for a library? Me with my love of rules, instructions, details. Me with my common sense and love of conformity. I don't feel any enthusiasm when I hear hotshots Ellen and Johanne debate the finer points of cataloguing or ordering.

Everyone is established in little cliques now. Group A is so segregated from us, I sometimes forget there are two classes in the program. But then something happens that reminds me why I like some of these people so much. Today in psychology class, Andrea spoke out and said each and every person in the class was a gem and there was such love and compassion in our class that she had never expected in a million years. Someone in the class who did not know Fred Merritt asked what Fred's problem was. I loved Andrea's answer. "Fred's a brilliant fellow and you know what brilliant people are like!" Then she smiled and shrugged.

Poor Els seems depressed these days, as if she is feeling out of her element. She is very creative and an expert weaver. I love her clothes, the colours and textures. Funny how I never noticed sadness in her face last year. All I saw was the ebullience and outspokenness. Today I noticed how she will start a conversation, say something original or quirky and then compress her lips so that her face closes up, as if she expects disapproval and misunderstanding.

Ellen is now the lab assistant (officially head girl). This job is doing her good. Her attitude toward Fred Merritt has changed. She has really taken the position to heart and is almost comically helpful and courteous. She even said she felt sorry for Wilfred and tried hard to make conversation with him when they boarded the same bus. Wow, Ellen! Responsibility looks good on her. One of the reasons she is so sensitive to not excluding anyone is because she used to be left out of activities at school. I would never have guessed that.

Ellen told us about a traumatic encounter she had with “Cheech” who is in first year. Cheek’s real name is Sam. He is a stringy little man, bald on top, long greasy black hair, scruffy black beard. His clothes are dirty and he wears a bandana on his forehead. As lab assistant, Ellen had to help out for Orientation day. She ended up with Cheech in her group and had to escort him around the school. He flared up at her over some second-hand books. “You’re backing away from me,” he said. “You’re shutting yourself off. Don’t do that. You’re in second year and if you do that, how am I supposed to respect you? You’re not supposed to be trying to humiliate me.” Ellen left the room.

Betty Bennett and Els happened to be in the same room. They both stuck up for Ellen. Els told him he had been too harsh with Ellen and hurt her feelings. He then set off down the hall after her. He caught up to her and held out his hand to shake it, then apologized for upsetting her. She shook his hand and said, “Have a *really* nice day.” This is what she says when she is accosted by panhandlers. She was so upset by the encounter that she burst into tears. He completely violated her space and sense of privacy, and she is a lot more sensitive and vulnerable than she appears.

One day when she was younger she fell and her mother told her that she should have closed her mouth and now they would have all these dentist bills to pay. “Aren’t parents wonderful,” she said with a sigh. She has a hard time getting along with her sisters, especially the one closest in age because she has a terrible temper and will literally scream when she loses it. Sounds familiar to me!

After this encounter with Cheech, we went outside for a while then over to Nancy’s apartment for the afternoon. Ellen, Lynn and Mika went together. I went with Nancy and we had a great talk. Nancy’s apartment is cozy with cat pictures and whimsical Nancy objects here and there.

Mika and I looked through photo albums. Nancy in many ages, incarnations. Beatnik, Carnaby Street, sitting on top of a car, leaping a hurdle, holding a kitten, looking tender and sensitive, almost shy. A darling photo. We had two beers each and went rolling back to school and into psychology class.

Sept. 10-11

Boot visited for the weekend. Enjoyable and irritating. She arrives with so many expectations it feels like ten tons of baggage thrust into my arms. I feel as if i've got to do handsprings, backflips, somersaults. I'm the one who is always in a good mood and supportive of whatever drama she's got herself in now. Meanwhile, the school thing really bothers me. The three of us went to see the Woody Allen movie, *Zelig*. I thought it was quite ingenious, but she was bored and made no attempt to hide it. Then she behaved like a prima dona when Sharon came to visit.

She wouldn't come out of the bedroom the whole time Sharon was here and when she did emerge she wouldn't say anything, only returned to the bedroom to whisper with Fred. I have no problem with her not wanting to visit with a friend of mine, but this weird rude show she put on. Go for a walk or something. Read a book. She could have watched TV. This was a passive-aggressive show of "you should be paying attention to me."

Sept. 22

Interview with Mrs Weihs. I was in there hardly more than 5 minutes, both of us direct and right down to business. No small talk from either of us. I like dealing with her for those reasons. She is very sharp, her eyes and nose birdlike. She notices everything as if it was prey, swoops down and bears it away to some compartment in her mind in which it is catalogued and filed for some future use.

Our names are all on invisible catalogue cards in her files. Battler, Lesley. Back row, quiet, not enough respect for AACR2 rules, commutes from Whitby, excellent work placement report. Yet Mrs W has a big wide smile, which is her one way of social communication. She treats us with respect – the only person in the rubber-room to do so. Mr Alchuk told us today that she was appointed chairperson of the Joint Steering Committee in Chicago for cataloguing in the world. So she truly is an authority in her field. He said she was too modest to say so herself, and he didn't know until he asked her point blank.

Later, the Group of 7 missed audio-visual (another dreadful) class and went to the Pizza Patio instead.

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Saw Jean-Jacques Beineix's film, *Moon in the Gutter*. It is considered controversial and not as good as *Diva* - nothing could be as good as *Diva*. Moon got under my skin, though. It is a very rich movie layered in imagery, symbolism. It was a bit of an onslaught. I found myself dreamwalking through the labyrinth of this movie, meeting up with tortured nightmare figures. A whole alternate universe of castles reflected in gutters, yellow-streaked walls that look like hieroglyphics, figures standing in shadow like archaeologists hopelessly trying to decipher the world they are in. Meanwhile, Nastassia Kinski floats through the night, wind blowing her red dress, her luminous eyes filled with tears. It was like three movies crammed into one, impossible to strip down. I felt intoxicated by it.

Sept. 23

Saw *Fanny and Alexander*, Bergman's last film. Powerful, unforgettable. The Christmas atmosphere, the blue snow, heavy dark furniture, maroon carpets and drapes. World frivolity contrasted with the deprivations of religion. A barren, stern god portrayed as a hideous puppet, a love offering only harshness and a form of strength untempered by mercy. Of course, ghosts. Ghosts that haunt the mind. The power of will, of imagination to bring these figures to life. Austerity, emptiness, light streaming in through the window with nothing to illuminate.. Everything is personified, coming to life around Alexander – puppets, masks, effigies.

The god puppet opens the door, is so brittle and dry it falls to the floor, glint of a cross in the blackness. This scene made me realize why I had to give every doll I owned a name and its own identity. They are terrifying, uncanny, completely inhuman until they are named.

Good talk with Johanne about the movie, Bergman films in general and the Scandinavian tradition of ghosts, eg., Strindberg.

Sept. 28

Dinner at Kim's. It was supposed to be a group event, but only two of us could make it, Ellen and me. A comically unlikely threesome. It turned out to be a nice evening. I stayed in Benjamin's room and Ellen slept on the pull-out couch. Kim bombarded us with food, stuffed tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, cheesecake and then popcorn.

The highlight of the day occurred when we were bringing Benjamin home from his day care. On our way into the apartment building, we came across a small boy with cerebral palsy and I will never forget how kind Ellen was to the boy. She took his hand and walked with him into the building. She talked to him and asked him questions, as attentive to him as she is to any of her friends.

We watched TV. I noticed Kim's greenish eyes darting back and forth and she had to get up and do things while watching the show. In contrast, Ellen's small neat head, her look of concentration, ingenuousness, sky-blue eyes, glasses.

Oct. 4

Joanne's birthday. She is 20 today, the youngest of our group.

I passed out at the end of Mr Alchuk's class. That room is too hot and there is not enough oxygen in it, and I complained to Facilities about it last year. Kim was sitting beside me and she had me put my head down between my knees. People brought me styrofoam cups full of water. Andrea came over and patted me on the back and when I sat up again, a nurse was standing there, Mr A, and half a dozen people.

The nurse and someone else took me downstairs to the nurse's office. Kim and Joanne came with me. Kim told the nurse that the room was so bad everyone got sick in it. Fred Merritt came wandering in, briefcase and all, to see what was going on and add his testimony. Joanne and I made up Toronto Sun headlines: "Death Classroom Claims Library Tech Student"; "Student Dies in Library Tech Class."

After I returned to class, Mr A said he knew exactly how I felt, that he had to drink all his coffee in order to survive. He suggested I sit at the front of the class, but I mentioned that I usually sat in the back corner so I could make a quick getaway. "Didn't make it out in time?" he said, looking knowingly at me.

Oct. 12

Today, Els, Nancy and Lynn complimented me on my clothes, my style of dressing, saying it was creative, clever and "very interesting." I was dressed in my black and white plaid shirt and knickers. Eva came into the room and said, "Lesley, you look utterly decadent!" I wasn't sure what to make of that. Later, I asked Susan what it meant when someone tells you they look "utterly decadent." Susan replied, "Good gracious, I don't know these days, but I'd take it as a compliment."

It seems as if Mr A has come as close as he will to apologizing for the way he picked on Kim last year. He declared that we were to always feel free to ask questions, even if it seemed as if he was tired or irritable. He hasn't picked on Kim at all this year, and Kim hasn't come out with any of her howlers. She raises her hand and respectfully asks questions.

Oct. 18

Today I was sitting quietly in the room with Mika and Ellen. Mr Alchuk was standing at the front. He looked at me and said, "I've been hearing nice things about you." I figured he was talking to Ellen, but she didn't respond. Finally I said, "Me?" "Yes you."

Turns out he had been sitting next to Joan Kelly at the library conference and she had mentioned me, the good work I was doing and how she wished she had more students like me coming in. Then he said this was good because the library world was very small. Hearing that made my whole week. I really like feeling competent and sane. And as Andrea said later, it was nice of him to tell me – he didn't have to!

Then Mr A started spinning his tales, one of his “when I was a library science student at McGill” stories. A group of people he knew always got together at Brother André's pub, and they started complaining about how they never saw him. He brought his typewriter to the pub, typed up his cards, waved and said hi to all the people who came in. Of course the story was quintessential Alchuk replete with gestures and details that may or may not be literally true. But when stories are this much fun, who cares how embellished they are.

He and Mika exchanged Europe stories. He talked about Paris, how the people there are so blasé and how he hated it there at first. Then he went to the Netherlands, which he liked because the people were friendly and drank milk and ate cheese. Then on to London, which he loved, to visit a friend. He likes Austrians because they are full of life, but he was attracted to Paris because it wasn't like anywhere else and made every other place seem boring.

Els came in and sat down beside me. I explained some of my psychology notes to her. We both admire and respect each other and knee deep inside we can learn a lot from each other. She respects my ability with the written word. I admire her openness, her desire to get meaning from life and communicate it. She chastised Mr A for drinking so much coffee and we all called her “Mom.”

Oct. 22

Marched down Queen Street in the anti-cruise missile rally. There were 17,000 people out there today. I was somewhere in the middle of the parade and had a sore throat, so I just walked quietly, holding my placard. It turned out that Johanne and Andrea were also there.

Oct. 27

Ran into Nancy first thing this morning and we responded spontaneously and sincerely to each other. We went for coffee and Ellen joined us for a while. After Ellen left, Nancy and I had a terrific conversation, all liveliness and humour about the lunacy of Seneca College and our essays for Ms Dodd. She made a cake for my birthday and made sure the Gang of 8 assembled at 11:00, and I was so touched. We met for lunch. She, Lynn, Johanne and I went to St Hubert, where Johanne and I got into a conversation about James Joyce.

Returned to the apartment and found a birthday card from Rosalind – always that mixture of the old-fashioned and unpredictable. “Married life is great. Why not? My dear Brian leaves early. I run about the house cooking up all sorts of concoctions or washing windows or making the house pretty. Lots of fun and quite a novelty for me.” I still don’t have a good feeling about this marriage or about the Reverend Dimmesdale.

Also received a lovely card from the Professor. “Her Highness of the Kingdom of Morning Mist, Lou I, enjoys and partakes of an honorary dinner/breakfast held by the people of the Twinkling Eyes upon the occasion of Lou I’s birthday. They toast their favourite friend with Willow Wine and Banana Blossom Cake.” I love my wonderful, whimsical, creative, original friends!

Card from Val. She is in Ottawa again, working part-time at Sears. Not a word about Al, Neil, Matt. Only one mention of Emile and Montréal. A rather sad card and letter, tentative and stripped down. A communication between only herself and me without the ghostly appearances of all the people around us and between us.

I received an F on my first cataloguing assignment. F. Devastated. Dreamed I made 8,609 mistakes on my final class project.

Oct. 31

Went for a walk with Mika. We talked about school and how we must not lose our perspectives. She said I shouldn’t worry, Mr Alchuk likes me and has a special rapport with me, so I’ll be fine. We talked about travelling, her weekend trip to the States, my ages-ago trip to New Orleans. The walk restored my soul. She is gentle, receptive and cares about inner well-being.

Nov. 1

A very special day. Today in psychology class, the subject of death and dying came up. Andrea shared her story of how her fourteen year-old son Howard died in her arms. Two of her sons and some neighbours were driving around the field on a home-built buggy and it overturned on a groundhog hole. None of the rest of the family could accept it and Andrea handled all the funeral arrangements. Five years later she is missing him more than after it had just happened. "It was as if he had been gone for a while and it was time for him to come back," she said.

She and her son Allan "had words." He accused her of having never absolved him for Howard's death, and she had the wisdom to say, "No. You cannot put this guilt on me. I have never held any blame on you. This was something you've had to work out yourself and not palm off on me." She had the strength to say that – and to tell us about it today.

After class, Ellen approached Andrea and said, "That was the saddest story I've ever heard." Then she started to cry. Andrea embraced her and Ellen hugged her back. Another beautiful moment.

Andrea gave me a ride home. I told her how much I was learning about life and living from this class and how there were so many people I wanted to see in a day. She understood what I meant, said it was a special class, a class where people can share and that there is so much love and support. She said that each one of us is a gem and if she got nothing out of this year, she at least got to meet us.

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Later I phoned the Professor to thank her for the birthday card and we talked for 2 hours, sharing more of ourselves than we've done in a long time. A great talk about getting older, my class, our feelings of insecurity, depressions that come in spite of ourselves, sometimes with only weather as provocation. She said she had always looked forward to growing older so she would feel more comfortable with herself and less worried. We talked about colours, about how wonderful it would be if we could make our own clothes. She told me how she had got up at 6 am to surprise a friend by constructing a little gazebo in her backyard. I love the Professor's brightness, ingenuity and creativity.

Nov. 2

Kim received an A- on her cataloguing assignment. She sat in class knitting herself a pink sweater. Take that nay-sayers!

Nancy was upset with her husband, Dave, so she, Johanne, Ellen and I went out. Stopped off at Bremerly's for drinks and then Toby's for dinner. It was pouring rain and the four of us stood under the canopy for a long time, trying to decide what to do. We eventually went to Johanne's and drank wine supplied by Ellen. It's comfortable at Johanne's, a good atmosphere for conversation. I am always surprised and delighted by JC's intelligence and her wide range of conversation, including art, literature, movies.

Nov. 3

Ups and downs. Whirlpools. A treacherous day at school. The Gang of 8 took our places at the back of Mr Alchuk's class, reminding me of jurors - "all rise" - where we slouched, slumped, doodled as Mr A talked in circles, in 4/4 time as Nancy and I kept time to his rhythmic talking. Suddenly the rhythm broke. He stood straight, looking at us, eyes wide, angry and vulnerable at the same time. "You're not listening," he said. "I know it's boring, it's repetitive, but you have to know it. You think you're so damned sophisticated but you don't know it. You're still bringing me garbage and I would never work with you in Technical Services." Then he left the room for 20 minutes or so.

"Who's he mad at?" demanded Kim. "He has no right to swear at us like that."

"Who *is* he mad at?" someone asked.

"Us," said Faye Zeidman, diplomatically.

"It happens," said Andrea.

I felt really bad, but the rest of the gang was completely unrepentant.

Nov. 4

After yesterday's turmoil, I was really happy to see Friday come in. This term's work placement is every Friday for a month, this time a school library in North York. I find it quite enjoyable. Joan Kelly is tall and birdlike with a big slightly nervous smile. She outdoes herself in making us feel welcome and comfortable. Carol, the secretary, is steady, the voice of reason, sanity, goodness – and so is Ann, the volunteer who comes in the mornings to work. Someone (and Mika thinks this is courtesy of Mr A at his conference with Joan Kelly) found out I have a degree in English from Queen's, and the attitude has completely changed. The teachers I am introduced to in the lunch room now look at me with respect, include me in conversations and even consult me. The kids are endearing and there was a really poignant moment today. I saw a little girl named Cindy Horvath came into the office, unable to find her home form number. The boy with her ridiculed her. Cindy was so endearing and had so little confidence in herself, agreeing with this boy that she had no brains. My heart ached for her.

At first, I was really scared of working in a school library as I don't really interact with the children, but that is completely up to the teachers. Mostly I drift around the library, doing my work, moving swiftly and invisibly among the students. Anonymous, efficient, invisible working me. I quite like it.

**

Stayed late at school with Joanne M. I've been spending more time with her lately. I'm glad because I enjoy her company so much. We have a compatible sense of humour and a general comfort level. It was dark when we left the school and we managed to cloak-and-dagger our way out of the building without Fred Merritt tagging along with us. We felt like cat burglars sneaking out into the night. We laughed about our lives and school all the way to Finch Station. While we were sitting on the subway, stopped at the station, we heard running footsteps, a clattering briefcase and sure enough, Fred Merritt charged in, breathless, clunking himself down beside us. Joanne and I looked at each other and laughed and laughed and laughed. "Why us, Lord?" "There is no escape from the Seneca College Loony Bin." FM is absolutely fascinated by the Gang of 8.

Received a wonderful card from the Professor. She had glued a black and white photograph of pine trees in mist to a piece of paper and added a wizard and rainbow in the corner. Words written in white said, "Lou, you're a wonderful friend." The phone call had been as special for her as it had been for me and I felt so much joy reading her note,

"Dear Lesley (Lou, of course)

I just wanted to thank you for your call the other night. It really seemed to give me a boost I've been needing. I admire your values and character so much and was therefore *indeed* flattered that you chose to chat (long distance) to me. (I even went ahead and made a skirt the next day! I enjoyed hearing from you!

Sincerely

Love,

Lou II

PS: Also, the next day we received a beautiful first snowfall – enough to glisten the ground. Thought you'd enjoy too."

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Eerie drive along Highway 2 between Oshawa and Port Union Road. Illusory, false, inhuman. Some kind of invasion. Everywhere I look houses sprouting like movie sets. Fields living on borrowed time. More advertising, inflation. Fake feudal flags, mock estates. How much farther can we go with this? These houses all look the same, exteriors for Chrysalids, access roads plowed into claustrophobic cloisters. Sure, why not smash real communities and install let's-pretend replica colonies. At night the houses stand in rows, staring vacantly straight ahead. Houses for robots.

Nov. 13

Val called. It was good to hear from her. It is all over between her and Matthew (thank goodness), and she has not leaped into anything since then. She talked about going to Montréal and seeing her friends in the frat house. We made a promise not to lose contact with each other.

She said she often misses me and thinks about how much more fun she'd be having if I were with her. I feel the same way about her. Jim moved out of his parents' house in Lachine and is living in an apartment on rue Docteur-Penfield. He is taking Occupational Therapy at McGill and apparently thinks of me with nostalgia now.

**

Lying face down, listening to Juluka's Scatterlings of Africa, over and over.

“And we are scatterlings of Africa
both you and I
we are on the road to Phelamanga
beneath a copper sky
And we are scatterlings of Africa
on a journey to the stars
Far below we leave forever
dreams of what we were ...”

**

Beautiful sunny day. Joanne, Mika, Nancy and I on a lighthearted walk back to school from the Deli. Mika and Nancy are so close it seems they can read each other's minds.

**

Mild rainy days. Went wandering down to the Metro Toronto Reference Library, first solitary subway ride and ramble in a long time. Re-reading an old childhood favourite, *Christy*, on the subway. Got off at Bloor, roamed through the shopping concourse, my head full of the Appalachian mountains, thinking about the characters' medieval language, when I ran into Mr Alchuk, heading toward the reference library for a CLA meeting. He was wearing his leather coat, unbuttoned as always. He looked surprised, as he often does at me, and asked me what I was doing in this area. We talked a bit, then wandered off in opposite directions.

Also met up with Fred Merritt, who accompanied me to the GO station and waited with me until the train came in. He has been depressed about his marks, and has missed a few days because he has been getting sharp pains in his stomach, possibly due to stress. He looks haggard and there are dark circles under his eyes. There is a side to FM that other people don't see. One day after I handed in my cataloguing project, I told FM I managed to verify one name he had not found. He went through every volume of NUC. Mr A could not resist baiting him, reminding him of the two marks he would lose, and how we would never hear the end of it all.

**

Marsha called. We talked mostly about Sharon and Ernie. It seems that the 3 of them went to the Kleinburg Gallery and Ernie took a tantrum and walked out of the gallery, claiming that Sharon was embarrassing him.

I like Ernie well enough but I do find him unpredictable, hard to decipher. I can't even pick up any signals, only a vague unease which makes me behave excruciatingly polite and banal so as not to trigger something I can only sense. He really must wonder what Sharon sees in me. There is something acute about his eyes, something that never stops moving, like meters back and forth, click-click-click. When I told Fred about the episode, he defended Ernie, usually the only one of us who does. Fred likes him because they share many interests and their backgrounds are similar, e.g, strange mothers, jerky brother. Fred also has a similar volatility - I really never know what will set him off. I'm glad Ernie has a champion. I prefer to be at arm's-length.

**

Wheeze and John dropped in at 3 a.m to spend the night. They were at a bowling tournament in Trenton and off to visit her relatives in Lindsay the next day. Saw a little bit of Wheeze on Saturday morning, lounging around in her pyjamas. I love that so much.

**

Went to the ballet with Sharon. *Don Quixote* was playing, starring Karen Kain and Frank Augustyn. Karen Kain has a radiance and exuberance to her that Veronica Tennant doesn't have. To me VT's dancing is concentrated, intense, somehow private, as if no one is watching, whereas KK seems joyously on display. Sharon was in a good mood and I enjoyed the day very much. We rode streetcars and subways talking about anything and everything. We went down to the Exhibition grounds, wandered around the craft show. Ernie joined us at a restaurant for dinner, and that feeling of constraint, of not knowing where I stand, or how to relate to him returned full force.

**

Mary Maleki and I had a good talk about Fred Merritt. She is also concerned about him. I told her he was depressed over his marks and really dislikes psychology class, because he thinks Shirley Clark is discriminating against him, putting him in the same category as Wilfred. FM suffers from epilepsy and looks mentally challenged, but he is bright, astute, observant and jolly good company. I think he is right on about Mrs Clark's perception of him. Mrs C moves and dresses like a little clockwork doll and doesn't relate to any of us emotionally. Sometimes FM comes out with some interesting and revealing things in the class.

One day, Mrs Clarke asked if we thought people really evaluated us according to appearance. Why a psychologist would even consider this a question is beyond me. El spoke right up and said, "Yes of course," and FM agreed very firmly and said, "Yes, exactly." Then he, in response to someone's question, said that children in school should not be taught about mental disorders because then they would be labelled and stereotyped and not given a fair chance. I found myself telling all this to Mary Maleki because she was sympathetic and concerned about him. Andrea is the only other person to whom I can talk about FM because I know she also cares about him.

**

Surreal ride into Seneca. Sky dark and blurry. All around me, lanes of highway, cars, motion, headlights, a whole string of headlights leading into the distance. How do all these people come to be here? Cars flowing past each other in two directions, from the past into the future, in and out of dimensions. Lives contained in metal shells moving around me. Everything so grey and anonymous. Cars moving through tundra, a bleak futuristic nomansland where neon signs appear like northern lights over desolate plains. "Far behind I leave forever dreams of what we were."

Nov. 28

Class presentations. Brought in mounted photographs to illustrate my presentation. Many people inquired about them, which bolstered my confidence, not only in getting through the speaking part, but also in realizing that I have things to offer a workplace. So I can't catalogue. So it takes me five years to learn it. I can actually put together an interesting and effective presentation. Even Mrs Weihs told me that it was very interesting. She asked if the photos were mine and came up to look at them closer after the presentation. Then she apologized for making me wait until 1:30.

**

All eight of us went to Sherwood's for a long lunch. I am fascinated by the interrelationships that have built up in the group. Ellen remains our den mother, loyally sticking by the group, always making sure no one feels left out. She offered to do the Dewey numbers with me. Mika and Nancy come together naturally. There is something deep and sympathetic there. Nancy brings out a humorous, teasing side to Mika. Nancy respects Ellen very much but can never resist getting her goat. Johanne and Nancy discuss life. Kim and Lynn continue on, both part of the group and outside of it. Kim so generous and spontaneous and always so underestimated. Lynn, efficient and cautious. Nancy says she has never met anyone like Kim in her life. Mika says that people tend to back away from her at first. They are hesitant.

After lunch, we returned to school just in time to get on the subway with Mr Alchuk and Fred Merritt. We all ended getting off at College Station.

“This is College,” Mr A said, unable to suppress his shepherding instincts.

“I know,” I said. “I’m running an errand. I don’t know what he’s doing.” I indicated Fred Merritt.

Mr Alchuk looked confidential and said, “I think he’s following you.”

I’m not sure which of us blushed more.

The other day, when FM was making the first years break out into riotous laughter, Mr Alchuk said to me, “Now I’ll have to go in there and depose Mr Merritt. I really should be like a rock group and send him in as a warm-up act for me.”

Dec. 6

Spent an afternoon wandering around downtown with Fred Merritt. Found myself in old haunts, thinking of Jim. Some similarities here. Once again I am with someone I like and want to keep as a friend. Once again, the other person is falling for me. There is something strangely unspontaneous and suspect about FM’s effusive affections, just as there was about Jim’s.

I feel again as if I’ve just wandered onto a stage that has been set up for a long time. They’ve both had romantic fantasies for so long that I ended up triggering these scenes. Jim came to the point where he became obsessed with being in love. I lost all identity. I died as a real person and our freindship died because of that. Many times it seems as if Jim didn’t even like the real person, and only wanted to change her. I feel as if I am now in a precarious place with FM.

FM has a close male friend whom he thinks the world of, a fellow university student, named Stephen, who is very similar to Jim’s friend Dan. Stephen often comes over to visit with FM at 10 pm and leaves at 2 in the morning. To continue similarities, FM has a talented, intelligent and beautiful sister, Ann, an Osgoode Hall lawyer recently featured in Flare magazine. He talks about her all the time and compares everyone to her.

I understood Jim better than FM though. FM is an enigma. He is interested in Latin American history and likes to dazzle me with his knowledge of Mayan, Aztec and Incan mythologies. His degree is in Spanish-Latin American Studies, yet he can be so inflexible. A word Mr A has used on FM. To FM, there is only one way of doing things, only one way of living. I get the feeling he's been sheltered and never allowed to grow up. He has a quick mind, but isn't really being used.

I got him to admit he likes Kim, and he said he likes blondes because "you could have fantasies about blondes." Brunettes, in his opinion, are more down-to-earth. He switches constantly between intuitive, insightful observations about people to outright stereotypes. He accompanied me to Union Station. I teased him about Kim, and then he put his arm around me and said, "That's all changed now." I escaped through the gate.

Dec. 7

Ellen invited us to her house and she, Nancy, Mika, Joanne and I all took the subway out to Islington. We sat around the table and talked about our childhoods and old teachers who affected us. Ellen told us about her friend Kathy who invited Ellen over to her house. They were both jumping on Kathy's bed when K's mother came into the room. The mother took Kathy aside and yelled at her. Ellen went home in shock. As soon as she got in the door her mother demanded to know what was wrong. Ellen was told to go back over and apologize. It took her two hours to work up enough nerve but she did it.

Met Ellen's sisters and parents. She says she doesn't get along with her sisters at all. They are small, sharper, "cooler" than Ellen, named Janet and Catherine. Mrs Ryan looked earthier, warmer than I expected. She always sounds so strict, I was expecting her to resemble Sharon's or Val's mothers – rigid, priggish. Mr Ryan is tall and built like Ellen, with the same slope to his shoulders. Her eyes lit up when her father came into the room. She started talking enthusiastically and her eyes were bright.

**

Kelly Smith from Class A came up to me and invited me to St Hubert for breakfast. On our way out we ran into Fred Merritt, and of course he needed to know where we were going. “Breakfast,” said Kelly. “Breakfast,” he repeated in surprise, then stood, letting this information sink in. “You two?! That’s weird!” We left him looking after us. He is fun to surprise.

**

Note from Shirley Lee left inside my bag:

“Leslie – Do you realize this is the last day of cataloguing? (I still can’t spell it without shaking).”

**

Later, Joanne and I got together to work on our reference skits. She had asked me to be her partner. I am going to wear her glasses and play the part of librarian. Joanne is going to stuff pillows under a black outfit and pretend she is an Italian woman who wants to know what the word “obnoxious” means. She is a natural comedian and we are always laughing when we’re together. It was also delightful taking the bus alone with her without hearing the bonk of Fred Merritt’s briefcase.

Dec. 9

Last day of work placement in North York school. I am going to miss it. Joan Kelly has praised me so extravagantly for my cataloguing – wish I was anywhere near as good as she says. Joan was flustered today. There are staffing problems, some sort of subterfuge. She was up until 4 am trying to work out some kind of strategy. It was a strange day, middle of exams and since the cafeteria wasn’t open she felt guilty because I didn’t have any lunch. I didn’t want to tell her I don’t really like sitting in the staff room. She insisted I leave early so I could eat before heading home.

We sat at the circulation desk drinking coffee, talking, joking, going over the cataloguing I had done on all the second-hand misfit books she had been avoiding – the ones she saves for the students. She asked me not to tell anyone she said that or she wouldn't get any more “suckers – oops, I mean students” to come here any more. She said I was an A-1 cataloguer and she liked my work better than the cataloguing that is commercially done.

Then she sent me on a “mission” to the office to deliver a message because she didn't want to go to the English department Christmas party and did not want to run into the department head. I don't blame her. This department head was one of the ones I met in the staff room at lunch times and she used to smile at me in a very smarmy way.

Joan, in contrast, is always herself. Often querulous, sometimes impatient, always wanting to please. She also has a mischievous, lightly teasing sense of humour. She was poking fun at Jean Weihs's “Dewey Day.” One day she asked me why they place so much stress on cataloguing at Seneca. I said, “Probably because the course director is -”

“Yes yes,” Joan cut in, “Jean Weihs.”

It was so nice working with someone who cares for their job but also retains a sense of humour about it! She told me I was going to get all excellents on my report. She also asked me to come back and visit, or drop in some time for coffee. I would like to do that very much.

Dec. 14

After our Reference exam the Gang of 8 went to Sherwood's. No studying. No cataloguing talk. We kept ordering Seneca Specials, much to Joanne's dismay. It all started when Lynn said we were a supportive and very special group and she wanted to still be in touch with everyone in ten years. Then Nancy and Ellen said we can't lose touch with each other, which is what usually happens and everyone agreed to set aside a day every month for as long as we're all in a position to see each other.

Joanne gave us all little Christmas stockings filled with chocolates and a note for each of us. Mine said: “Dear Lesley – Your name might be Lesley but you’ll always be Ms Battler to me! Have confidence in everything you do because you have the ability. You have so much talent, just let it shine through, Les. I have the confidence in you that you will succeed in everything you do. ‘Our strength is made perfect in weakness.’ God bless you and have a great holiday!! Love always, Giovanna (otherwise known as Joanne or Miss Montemurro. Your friend forever. PS: Thanks for laughs Lesley!”

I don’t know who started it, but we went around the table predicting everyone’s future two years after school ended. Everyone agreed Joanne would be working in a public or children’s library and that she would be either married or engaged (but not to Stefano). We agreed that Kim would probably not get a library job, but because of her personality, she’d get the best job of us all doing something else. There was also a group consensus that she would go on to take a completely different course, either at night, or another one at Seneca. Now that she knows she’s bright and capable, she’ll want to keep going on!

Ellen will be married to Blaise and taking over Mrs Weihs’s position. Joanne thought Ellen would be in a bank library. She also said Ellen would live in a house, have two children, join clubs and do a lot of social organizing. Ellen told us she used to be really skinny and ugly when she was young, with big glasses and braces. She used to feel rejected and excluded at school, and I don’t see her as wanting to follow in Mrs Weihs’s footsteps, or end up isolated in a special library, but she is a natural leader.

We all thought Nancy would get a library job, but would become dissatisfied and quit. This is a pattern in her life. Her expectations are so high. She’s had about eight jobs since leaving high school. We also thought she would most likely be pregnant, or seriously preparing for her first child. It could be the *Encyclopedia of Baby and Child Care* on a shelf in her apartment that gave us our first clue. A lot of us were sketchy about Johanne Cunliffe. I’m glad I’m not the only one who had to admit to not knowing her very well. It was Kim who said she didn’t know JC well because she was new to the group. Johanne good-naturedly replied, “Yes, who is this strange creature.”

One of the most hilarious scenes all year was JC and Nancy doing push-ups on the Audio-Visual class floor – and inducing Ellen to join them. That should give an idea of how much respect we had for Mr Rushton. Nancy and JC also drew big fat cats on the black board.

Soon it was my turn. They said I would move to an exotic place, get involved in a strange, all-consuming relationship, deeply involved in something obscure and private. Lynn said I wouldn't be living in this country, that I would be involved in a very strange relationship and my first book would be published. I would be involved in something very obscure because I keep my private life very private.

Joanne's predictions were the funniest. She said I'd be "living by the St Lawrence with some fat slob serenading me under my window every morning, but in the meantime you'll fall head-over-heels for the guy across the hall." Mika said I would join a literary club, but Lynn disagreed and said she could never see me joining a club of any sort, that I wasn't a club joiner or group person. Ellen thought I'd be living in Ottawa. At one point she said I was the one, out of everyone, the group would lose.

Nancy said I would get a library job – in a cataloguing department. "Nancy!" I said, aghast, but she was unrepentant. She really does think that will happen. She thinks I will be involved in a strange relationship – with a politician. "I hate politicians!" I protested. "I know you do and it'll be really strange, but for some reason it'll work. It'll keep going." Kim had the last word, though. "You'll be lucky though. Politicians have lots of money."

We all went quiet when we came to Mika. We realized she is an enigma. Nancy joked that she was really a Russian spy infiltrating our group, a KGB agent. For some strange reason I could see something physically exerting or emotionally draining in her future. This really interested her and she said, "Hmm, she's tapping into something here." We teased Mika about how we don't know her private life. She mentioned Thayne, the young lawyer she went out with a couple of times, but now nothing.

Our lunch lasted four hours. We shouted and laughed and shared a special time. When I returned to the apartment I was in high spirits. Wheeze called. She was also in a great mood and conversation flowed. She called me a nut and we arranged to get together over the holidays.

Dec. 15

Andrea Jones gave me a ride to the exam today. We had a great talk about Fred Merritt and how he has been mooning over me in class, and how everyone knew it before I did. I told her about David Bates liking Ellen, and Andrea said she didn't think Ellen would be as kind as I was (to FM), that Ellen can be blunt and hurtful without intending to be.

Went to Nancy's apartment after the Psychology exam. It was all done up for Christmas. She really puts a lot of effort into Christmas decorations. We exchanged gifts. I gave Mika a pair of elephants, one yellow, one blue. Mika asked me if there was any significance to the colours. Nancy, intrigued as she always is by Mika, teased, "Why Mika, what significance could there possibly be in the colours?" Apparently those shades of yellow and blue are Ukrainian colours. I had no idea of that at the time and chose them because the colours suited Mika. Mika said I was "full of insight." Ride with Lynn to the Go station. We have a good rapport.

Dec. 16

The day started off well, everyone excited about the holidays. Kim gave Christmas cards with pictures of the class members to everyone. Mary Maleki thinks we'll be the class that will still be holding reunions in ten years, that there is some special chemistry in our group.

The day that started so well was destroyed when I went to be manually tested in Audio-Visual class. It did not go well. Lynn Cameron (from Group A), Fred Merritt and I now all have incompletes on our report. Rushton passed me on everything except the slide projector. I guess I placed the slides in upside down. This means I could fail the course. Spent a few hours wandering around the World's Biggest Bookstore with Fred Merritt, commiserating with each other.

Dec. 24

Christmas Eve feels like the last day of the year, the last day of life, motionless. The world has shut down. Streets are silent, snow-covered, empty. This is the lowest time of the year for me. Everything dreamlike; silhouettes reflected on snow. On the Highway 400, a slow caravan on the long road North. Barrie is our destiny. We cannot change our minds and turn around on this road in this weather.

Good to see everyone in Barrie, but also frustrating and nerve-racking to be around people who have spent their entire lives in one insular place and never come in contact with different people and ideas. None of them reads – I'm the only one. My father looks better. He has lost weight but everyone here is volatile, quick to take offence at the slightest word or tone. I feel I walk on eggshells. There is also no privacy in a cardboard house full of noises. Footsteps, static, radios, TVs, a buzzing gyre of mixed-up sound. Crossed signals, fuzzy connections.

Good talk with Nancy. She is taking a Special Ed program at Centennial College. Although she didn't like the course at first, she is getting a lot out of it now. She is sympathetic, understanding, practical and good with people. So incredibly refreshing here.

I alternate between enjoying my mother's company and wanting to run screaming from the room. My mother states the most ridiculous things and asserts they are true. When challenged, she claims someone else told the story and must have "coloured it." I am convinced she is trying to destroy me by taking away my identity. She appropriates my own interests and characteristics and attributes them to herself – kind of a body-snatcher.

I stopped confiding in her because I felt myself diminished she she could build herself up, give herself an identity by taking mine away. She has to take from others because she doesn't have a life of her own and doesn't try to create one. What do you do when you have a strong personality, strong feelings but nowhere to put them, no vehicle to use them and without enough inner resources to sustain yourself? What do you do when you have a dramatic temperament but no talent or drive? I think this applies to both my mother and Boot.

**

Visit with Sir Jefforie in Orillia. He was the perfect host, a perfect mask of courtesy, politeness, suavity. His apartment is beautifully arranged in perfect aesthetic order, full of objects that reflect luxury, taste and status. The carpets are wall-to-wall, which means he does not make a sound when he walks around. Sound is absorbed, silenced. You could live in an apartment below him and not hear his life. It was a very pleasant visit. We looked through a magazine he had on his coffee table, "Unique Homes," and the three of us could all dream about living in beautiful homes in California. He showed us photos of Dallas, his spiritual home. The best part of the visit was when we lapsed into our old jokes and catchphrases, though.

Dec. 27

Ran into Mr Beltz at Sam the Record Man's Boxing Day sale. It's been about 2 years since I last saw him. He looks much the same, a lot more grey in his hair. He was obviously stiff, moving painfully, his mouth with that drawn look. I was afraid to approach him, fearing he wouldn't remember me, but he recognized Fred and winked at him. When he saw me he smiled disarmingly and said, "Hi Bats."

"Where are you people hanging out now?" he asked. I said Toronto. I know, Whitby is the literal truth, but I do all my real living in Toronto. He asked me what I was doing now and I hesitated, feeling like a failure, as if I have gone nowhere in life. He is quick. Within seconds he had me pinned down. "Between jobs?" he asked/ I reluctantly admitted to having gone back to school. He groaned. "I don't want to hear about it. How long has it been now – 12 years?" Well, yes and no.

In spite of the dig, I think he still believes in me, though. He is still ironic, his wit dry, his words caustic, dry snow stinging as it flies into my eyes. He needles me and I stand on shifting ground, unsure of when he is real or false. He is sensitive but quick with the first sarcastic word or expression designed to leave the "opponent" unsure, and therefore unable to hit back. He is still one of the most stimulating people I have ever known.

The rest of the time at Sam's was spent in oneupmanship. He bombarded me with names of albums he was hoping to find, such as Tom Waits, Toots and the Maytals, the Chieftains, the Ramones, Handel's Water Music (which will always remind me of Cataloguing). Then I told him I was searching for a Kitaro album and was frustrated because I could not find it. He was immediately attentive and wanted to know who Kitaro was.

And – and I found the album, *Silk Road*, in the audiophile import sections, as if it had materialized out of my desire to have the last word, just once. I showed him and once again found myself unsure whether he was being sincere or mocking me (or both), when she said, “You should pick it up now, you'll treasure it for life.” I do still feel a deep sympathy between us, beneath the words, but some day I will show him. I really will prevail.

Dec. 31

Montréal, dove-coloured in the snow, muted greys and browns. After being in Toronto, a city with so much snow seems surprising. Snow is tossed up on yards, curbs, balconies, forming troglodytes, gargoyles. Ice on the walls surrounding a church resembling Mr Kurtz's heads mounted on stakes. Trees growing up through the spiral staircases. City of contrasts. Renault Le Cars swooping down the middle of rue Ste-Catherine. The large dark fortresses of Westmount, self-contained with their concealed life on the other side of the mountain. Light crinkles across a window with tin foil stuffed into a broken pane.

Spent New Year's Eve at the Cabana Grecque. A sweet evening, dark, quiet and intimate. Left a little after midnight. Softly snowing again and we spent the rest of the night exploring the city. St-Laurent looks the same, old restaurants with fogged windows. Schwartz's wedged between sweater factories, poolrooms, furniture stores with white plaster statues, Marie Antoinette bedroom sets and sofas. Yellow and Pitt's shoe stores, innumerable Croteaus.

Saw *Pauline à la plage* at Cinema V. Directed by Eric Rohmer. A firecracker wrapped in conversational fluff. A lot of serious points made about love, relationships, manipulations, games, youth and disillusionment. How one starts developing defenses, becoming part of the game you started off hating so much and rebelling against. Acquiescing yet staying aware enough to be able to shrug with sad acceptance. A wink, a shrug, yet with sadness at the same time, like the beach in the title. Pale, ephemeral, a bit washed-out. End of the day, end of the summer light.

Another film about relationships, *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie* by Henry Jaglom. Quirky, impressionistic, and also joyous. I could feel myself walking down that street in New York in the evening, a slight breeze, feeling elated, hopeful, restless, wanting to change my whole life and fly. It showed a relationship that could be changeable, quirky and unpredictable. When Zee and Eli are lying in Zee's bed, I could see a copy of Anaïs Nin's *Spy in the House of Love* propped up on the bookshelves. Nin appears again when Zee sits in a café, disconsolately reading a copy of *In Favour of the Sensitive Man and other essays*. I love seeing representations of unconventional "non-normal" relationships.

To the Bagel Factory on the way out of the city. Drove along the South Shore, past the factories, smoke in the sky, flat red rowhouses. Just then, a dove flew in front of the car, vanishing into the white sky, vanishing into the smoke.